

EIGHTEEN

TWO SHILLINGS

NEW WORLDS

fiction of the future



J. M. WALSH

1897 - 1952



Nova Publications regrets to announce the death, on Friday, August 29th, of J. M. Walsh, celebrated mystery writer and fantasy author, after a short illness.

Born in Geelong, Australia, he began writing as a hobby while still in his teens, and had numerous short stories published while still at school. When in his early twenties, he won a prize in a competition for the best Australian novel, and soon after decided to make writing his fulltime profession.

While still a young man he came to England and settled down to build the background of a literary career which has produced over one hundred full-length novels and scores of shorter stories covering many types of fiction, including science fiction, of which latter he was a pioneer. In the Collins Mystery Series he was as well-known under his pseudonym of Stephen Maddock as under his own name.

In the science fiction field he is best known for his two early novels, published originally in *Amazing Stories*, entitled "Vandals Of The Void," and "Vanguard To Neptune," the latter being published in pocketbook form in this country by Kemsley Press only a few weeks before his death. Under the pen-name of H. Haverstock Hill, he also had a semi-fantasy published before the war entitled "The Secret Of The Crater."

Long a pioneer writer of science fiction, he devoutly believed in it as a contemporary literature of the times and lived long enough to see it becoming an accepted fact. As an Adjudicator on the International Fantasy Award Panel his knowledge and good judgment of the field are irreplaceable.

Fantasy fiction has lost a great friend and noble henchman—but not before he had made a lasting contribution to the medium.

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The tiny garrison on Venus had two objectives in view—survival and conquest. If they could survive alien environment for five years, Earth would send colonists—but the Venusians had other ideas about conquest.

UNWANTED HERITAGE

By CHARLES GRAY

Illustrated by BULL

They were punishing a man that morning.

He stood facing the stockade, hands lashed to metal rings hammered into the raw wood above his head. His back was bare, sweat running in rivulets down the white skin, soaking into the khaki of his shorts. He looked sullen, defiantly staring at the exotic grain of the wood before his eyes.

Major Harrison planted stocky legs firmly on the soft loam of the compound, grasped both hands behind him, cleared his throat with a single harsh sound.

"Men," he snapped. "I regret the necessity for this punishment as much as you do, yet discipline must be maintained." He stared sharply at the assembled garrison, letting his narrowed eyes drift over the little group of civilian technicians standing to one side.

"Lassiter knew what he was doing. He knew the punishment for his crime. I had warned him. I have warned you all." Again his hooded eyes rested on the civilians. "Some of you may think the punishment too severe—I cannot agree. Any man who willingly associates with animals, must be expected to be treated like one."

The man lashed to the stockade stiffened, half turned his head, then shrugged and resumed his former position.

Harrison glanced at him. "What Lassiter did is known to you all, I shall not repeat it," contempt thickened his harsh tones. He nodded towards a sergeant. "Proceed!"

An orderly stepped forward, his shirt dark with sweat, the blood-red insignia of rank sewn to one sleeve. Rapidly he swabbed the naked back with antiseptic, stepped back. The sergeant reluctantly approached, swung the crude whip.

"One!" the thong slapped dully against the bare flesh.

"Two!" he muttered. "Three! Four!"

"Harder, man," snapped Harrison. "Put some life into it. Remember why he's being punished. Strike harder!"

The sergeant bit his lip, made the lash whistle through the air.

"Seven! Eight! Nine!"

"Harder," grated Harrison. "Harder still!"

Beneath the cutting blows, a pattern of criss-cross welts grew. Blood started to the pale skin, the long thin cuts oozing blood. Grimly, Lassiter bit his lips, the muscles of arms and shoulders standing out in sharp relief beneath the smooth white skin.



"Eighteen! Nineteen! Twenty!"

Thankfully the sergeant lowered the whip, wiped sweat from face and neck. Harrison grunted, nodded to the medic. He sprang forward, swabbed the wounds free of blood, sprayed on the collodion antiseptic.

Lassiter hadn't murmured during the flogging, but beneath the savage bite of the plastic dressing he whitened, strained madly at his bonds, then slumped in a dead faint. Phlegmatically the orderly finished covering the wounds with

the spray. Finally satisfied, he freed Lassiter's hands, supporting the sagging body against his own.

"Leave him," snapped Harrison.

"But the man is sick, sir," protested the orderly.

"Leave him. When he recovers put him on normal duty. His pain may teach him that I mean what I say." For a moment Harrison teetered on the balls of his feet, hands clasped behind him, narrowed eyes darting along the ranks of the garrison. Abruptly he spun on his heel, strode away.

The orderly watched him, his lips moving soundlessly. He glanced at the sergeant, shrugged, gently laid the unconscious man face down on the soft loam.

An officer bawled a sharp command. Two hundred men stiffened, jerked to attention, shouldered their arms. Further bawled orders. Like marionettes the ranked men split, swung into smooth motion, marched across the compound. The gates opened as they approached, swung behind them. Sentries commenced their slow circuit of the stockade, eyes probing the distance.

The little group of civilians watched the easy movements of military drill, glanced uncomfortably at each other, avoided the huddled figure on the ground. They too moved away, some to their laboratories housed in the low wooden huts, others back to their bunks.

The compound grew silent, deserted but for the lone figure against one wall. After a while he staggered to his feet, rested against the rough timbers a moment, wincing at the pain from his back, then stumbled painfully away.

A bird, scaly necked, leather winged, soared on fitful thermal currents, watching the scene below with curiously bright eyes. It wheeled, flapped rustling wings, then it too was gone.

The choking heat of the Venusian morning rolled across the deserted compound.

Ken Drayton looked up with sudden annoyance at the click of the door. Harrison, florid face streaming sweat, entered, kicked the flimsy panel shut behind him, slumped into a chair.

"I didn't see you this morning," he grunted. "Why not?"

Ken sighed, deliberately closed the file he had been studying, and turned to face the Commander. "I told you my reasons yesterday. Need I repeat them?"

"I issued a general order. All personnel to watch Lassiter's punishment. As Commander I expect my orders to be obeyed. Why didn't you attend?"

"I didn't want to," Ken said calmly. He raised a hand to stem the stream of abuse he expected. "Before you say another word, remember this. I am a civilian. A field psychologist. You are in full charge of the military, I in charge of the civilian technicians. I have tried to avoid friction between us, but I'll tell you this, one more such spectacle as this morning, and I'll forbid my technicians to obey you again. You can shame your own men, I won't have you shaming mine."

"Shame?" Harrison jerked upright in his chair. "What the devil do you mean? How else do you expect me to maintain discipline? I've over two hundred men in my command. They must obey orders. How else can I enforce them unless there is fear of punishment?"

"True," Ken nodded. "But why the whip?"

"Why not? It's quick, easy to administer, and does not weaken the strength of the garrison by detailing guards to watch a prisoner."

"I see," Ken watched him curiously. "You really believe that don't you?"

Harrison pursed thin lips, the hooded eyes lowering beneath a perpetual frown. With his short grizzled hair, the ramrod straightness of his back, he looked every inch the professional soldier that he was.

"I do," he snapped curtly.

"You know what will happen now, of course," Ken mused. "You have shamed Lassiter, shamed him beyond bearing. Even you, with your limited knowledge of psychology must be able to foresee the inevitable result."

Harrison gestured impatiently. "Lassiter is a soldier. He will accept the punishment and be all the better for it."

"Will he? What after all was his terrible crime? I tell you that there isn't a man in your command who doesn't sympathise with him."

"He disobeyed my orders," Harrison insisted stubbornly.

"Wrong orders."

"No. Orders designed to safeguard the lives of us all."

"Nonsense," Ken snorted. He glowered at the stocky commander, his long slightly saturnine face registering his disgust. "We've been here almost three years, and in all that time there has not been one instance of hostile action."

"Naturally. My men have seen to that."

"You think so?" Ken glowered at the file before him. "Aren't you rather overrating your power? Two hundred men with limited ammunition and fire-power against a whole planet. We could have been wiped out anytime during the past three years. We haven't been."

"Nevertheless, my orders stand. There will be no fraternisation with the animal life of this planet."

"You fool!" Ken exploded. "Why are you so blind? Animal life, why anyone can see that the natives are human. If we are to get anywhere at all we must have contact. Lassiter could have given us that. He is the only one of us all who has ever spent more than a few minutes with a Venusian," he grimaced. "And you have to whip him for it."

"Animal life," repeated Harrison doggedly. "They may look slightly human, that I'll admit, but think a moment—we are on Venus. A totally new world. How can the native life be anything near human?" He shook his head. "They are no more human than monkeys or apes are human. I won't have any man of my command cheapening himself and disgusting his comrades by associating with them. That is your job."

"Is it?" Ken smiled grimly. "Listen, Harrison, I'll make a prophecy. Lassiter was one of the first arrivals wasn't he? That means he's been here several years without the company of a woman. I've been watching him. I've noticed the general deterioration of morale. Lassiter isn't the only one, and I noticed the change in him after he met this native. A woman wasn't it?"

"A female," agreed Harrison. He looked his disgust. "He said that he met it while on patrol, he had stopped to adjust his equipment. It came from the jungle, for some weird reason they continued to meet. How he managed it I don't know, but it's stopped now."

Ken frowned, he had noticed Harrison's determination not to admit humanity to the natives, even in designation of sex. Not for the first time he felt intense frustration at the unworkable dual command forced on them both. He

tried to hide his anger.

"Lassiter was bored, miserable, unhappy. He hated the relentless routine of conditions here, it wouldn't be going too far to say that he was becoming a pathological case. Then he met this woman. Immediately he changed. He found comfort with this woman, a new life, a lessening of the pressure and strain. Then you had him flogged."

"I have warned him. I have warned them all."

"Maybe, but now what happens. He feels degraded. Life here has become even more unbearable. He needs comforting. Where else would he find that comfort but with the woman who has innocently been the cause of his trouble?" Ken thrust the folded file back into the cabinet.

"I predict that Lassiter will desert as soon as he is able."

Harrison laughed. He rocked in the flimsy chair, his still florid features convulsed with merriment. Ken eyed him with intense distaste.

"What's so funny?"

"He'll desert will he?" Harrison chuckled. "How wrong you are," he wiped his eyes. "Aren't you forgetting something?"

"What?"

"How's he ever going to get back home?"

The door swung behind him.

Sergeant Bob Foster wiped sweat from his eyes, and peered into the dimly lit depths of the jungle. It was hot. The towering bulk of the fern-like trees, wreathed with their garlands of vine and creeper, stretched on all sides. The path, beaten by continuous patrols, traced a thin line before them. Mechanically he plodded on.

For some reason he couldn't forget the episode of the morning. Lassiter, tied, flogged, treated like an animal. Unconsciously his hand curled, feeling again the butt of the crude whip. He hadn't wanted to flog Lassiter. He had protested, yielding only with the mental reservation to make the punishment as easy as possible. Harrison, damn him, had stopped that. He had cried for the sight of blood, and he'd had it.

An insect, brilliant winged, hovered with a faint drone above the path. Foster made a grab at it, and it jerked away with an angry hum. Ahead of him the patrol plunged their wooden way along the beaten track. They walked rather than marched, careless, listless almost, their weapons dangling loosely from slack hands.

Three years, he thought dully. Three years of utter waste, eternally prepared for a non-existent enemy. Day after day, the same routine patrol, the same manual labour. First it had been clearing the landing field, then erecting the barracks, then clearing the field again. Things grew on Venus. How they grew! Even the little gardens cultivated as a means of recreation by the garrison, bore exotic fruits and vegetables rare even in the tropics of Earth. Venus was a paradise, but what was paradise to Adam without Eve?

He wiped his face again, shifting the slim barrelled Vennor to a more comfortable position. He thought of Lassiter again, this time with a sick envy. A woman to talk to. A real woman. Someone to smile at, to be tender to, perhaps even to touch.

He stopped, listening to the faint sounds made by the patrol dying ahead of him. From a sweat soaked pocket of his shirt he pulled a wallet. Carefully he slid out a creased and tattered slip of paper. For a while he stared at the

photograph, his lips tightening with sudden exasperation. His wife, and she hadn't even written for the past three supply rockets. With sudden anger he screwed the photograph to pulp, flung it aside. It fell in a clump of rank growths, and he watched it moodily, searching his pockets for a ration cigarette.

The smoke calmed him—that, and the quiet almost cathedral-like atmosphere of the towering trees and the dim-lit jungle. He stretched, snubbed out the cigarette, carefully salvaging the butt. Vennor in one hand he lurched to his knees, half rolled, straightened—and froze in sudden immobility.

A woman stood in the path.

Tall, with a wealth of fine hair spilling from her forehead, rippling down her back. A single garment of some silken fabric, looped over one shoulder, draped under one arm, falling in soft full folds to just below her knees. Her arms were bare, her feet covered in crude sandals of what seemed to be bark. The dim light filtering through the thick jungle touched her hair, giving the startling first impression that she wore a halo.

A Venusian!

She had seen him, Foster knew. Carefully he stepped towards her, the Vennor deliberately pointing towards the ankle thick loam of the jungle floor.

"Hello," he said, and smiled.

She didn't answer. Foster swallowed hard, extended his empty hand. "Friend," he said. "Earthman," he touched his chest. "Bob."

Still no answer. Still she stood calmly before him, the wide eyes staring vaguely at a point just above his head. Carefully he stepped closer. Despite himself ugly thoughts reared in the back of his mind. Native or not, she was woman. They were alone, and it had been a long time, such a long time.

For the first time the woman acknowledged his presence. Her face twisted a little, with an expression strangely like disgust, she flickered, and somehow was standing just off the path. Desperately he followed her, hating himself for his own involuntary thoughts.

"Please," he begged. "Don't go away. Just let me talk to you. I know that you can't understand a word I'm saying, but at least let me see you again."

In the half light of the jungle her fantastically white skin seemed to glow with an inner light. Her hair, so blonde as to be colourless, clouded behind her. The wide staring eyes had a reddish tinge. From somewhere down the path a voice called, the patrol returning to look for him. Bitterly he cursed, and stepped nearer to the woman.

"I must go now," he said slowly and distinctly. "You be here tomorrow," he pointed to where the unseen sun mirrored the clouds in a great patch of golden light. He swept his arm in a circle, pointed at upwards again. "This time tomorrow. Understand?" He pointed at his chest, then at her, swept his arm in a circle again, then stabbed it at the ground between them.

"Tomorrow."

He stepped back onto the path, the Vennor unconsciously menacing the approaching patrol.

Ken sat moodily in the crowded recreation hut, letting the whirling blades of the fan try to cool his skin. Automatically he swallowed several salt pills, washing them down with tepid water. It was night. The gates of the compound locked, only the patrolling guards on their eternal march cursing the

insect laden darkness, stirred. All the rest were miserably trying to get comfortable in the stifling humidity.

A man slumped into a vacant chair beside him. Wilson, the biologist. Ken grunted a greeting. "Anything new?"

"New? Of course there is. There always will be for the next hundred years. How long do you think it takes to classify a planetful of specimens?"

"Sorry," apologised Ken with a wry grin. "I didn't mean exactly that."

"I know what you meant," sighed Wilson. "And the answer is the same. If we could only contact the natives, enlist their aid, it would make things so much easier," he clenched a fist, the knuckles whitening beneath the strain. He looked at it curiously. "You know, Drayton, sometimes I get the strangest feeling."

"Yes?" encouraged Ken.

Wilson laughed. "Always on the job aren't you? Always watching our reactions. I can't say that I blame you. Harrison's not much help."

Ken grunted noncommittally.

"Have you ever felt as if you'd like to smash things?" Wilson asked. "You know what I mean, like as if you've been trying to make something for a long time, and it keeps going wrong, finally you smash it—the feeling is wonderful."

"I know what you mean."

"Do you?" Wilson grinned self consciously. "I wish I did. I feel like that now. All this," he gestured at the night outside, "all this is too big for us. There's too much to learn, too much to do. A whole new world, and we can't even get started. Sometimes I feel as if I'd like to smash it, and go back home."

"Why don't you?"

"And regret it for the rest of my life?" Wilson shook his head. "No. It's too great a challenge. Every day I find something new, every day the mystery deepens."

"Mystery?"

"Of course," Wilson relaxed his hand. "Think of it a moment. Venus geologically speaking is in the Mesozoic period, there should be Dinosauria—and no men. Instead we find no Dinosauria, and natives that act like no natives I've ever seen before. It's out of my line, but isn't it the rule that primitive peoples always show curiosity?"

"Harrison regards the native life as animal," Ken said drily. "Animals are to a certain extent, unpredicable."

"That's nonsense," blurted Wilson angrily. "Animals don't wear clothes. I've seen the natives, not often—no one has seen them for long—but a few times at least. They are human," he clenched his fist again. "If I could only examine one," he breathed. "If only they would let me examine one of their dead."

"Don't mention that to Harrison," Ken said sharply. "He may send out a hunting party."

"Of course not, but it would answer so many problems."

"Maybe," Ken answered curtly. He was growing tired of the conversation. Like most specialists he couldn't understand fanatic interest in any field but his own. His own interest in the natives was purely psychological. He wanted to know why they had ignored the Earthmen. Why they had refused any form of contact. The thought of dissecting one was repugnant.

Yet it would answer the major problem. Were they human, fantastic as the possibility sounded, or were they, as Harrison insisted, merely animals with alien ways. When first the expedition had landed, the riotous growth of what had loosely been called the jungle, had made the crews wary. They had imagined great beasts, savage alien life, they hadn't found any, what they did see had caused even greater alarm.

Human-seeming shapes had been spotted at the edges of the clearing. They stood upright, wore clothes, seemed to be men. None had ever been captured, because they had an uncanny knack of melting into the shielding growth of the jungle, at the approach of search parties. For a while sight of them had been common, then they had gone, but the damage had been done.

An Earth, geared to the highest pitch of militarism, had acted in the only way possible to a people steeped in thoughts of violence. Earth, desperate for new land, spurred by the tantalising promise of a new paradise, had acted to safeguard the bridgehead. Two hundred men, armed with the deadliest portable weapons yet devised, had embarked for the new planet. For three years they had stood ready to defend the outpost. For three years they had patrolled the jungle. For three years they had expected sudden attack.

They were still waiting.

Grimly Ken wondered just how long they would be content to merely wait.

Sergeant Bob Foster tossed on his narrow cot, cursed the heat, the regulations that switched off all lights at too early an hour, the confines of the barrack hut.

He felt restless, the episode of the day remained too fresh in his mind. He sat up, fumbled for a cigarette, struck a light. Replacing the cigarettes his hand struck against the pocket containing his wallet, as he had done so often before, he opened it, groped for the tattered photograph, hoping to decipher it by the light from the glowing tip of his cigarette.

His fingers met emptiness, and he remembered his angry gesture while on patrol. Thought of one thing led to thought of another, within seconds he was reliving his meeting with the native woman.

She *was* human, he thought desperately. No animal could ever look like that. Logic, reason, the ingrained indoctrination of the past three years, all affirmed that there could be no humans on Venus. Instinct told him that there were. He had to know.

Carefully he slipped from the cot, donned shorts, fumbled his way to the connecting door. A voice muttered a sleepy question, he ignored it, felt his cautious way onwards. Behind him, a corporal felt curiously at his empty bed.

Lassiter wasn't asleep. The savage pain from his lacerated back wouldn't permit him to even rest in comfort. He lay, eyes staring into the darkness, lips drawn into a thin line. Foster carefully touched his shoulder.

"What!"

"Hush. It's me, Foster. Sergeant Foster. I want to talk to you."

"Why?" bitterness echoed in the harsh whisper.

"I don't blame you for hating me, but you shouldn't. I couldn't help it, I had to do as ordered. If I hadn't, we'd have both been flogged."

"So logic justifies your action," Lassiter laughed harshly. "What do you want me to do, forgive you?"

"No," Foster dropped his voice even lower. "I want to ask you something, will you answer me?"

"How do I know yet ? What is it ?"

"You knew a native didn't you ? A Venusian. A female. Tell me, are they human ?"

"Are you ? Is Harrison ?" Lassiter said dully.

"Never mind that. Tell me, are they human ?"

"Ask Harrison," Lassiter moved carefully on the cot. "He will tell you, and believe me, a whip can be very convincing."

Foster sat numbly on the edge of the bed. He felt clammy, the sweat trickling down his body. "I saw one today," he said dully. "It was while on patrol, I'd stopped behind for a smoke, nothing ever happens on patrol anyway. She was standing in the path, I spoke to her, I want to see her again," sudden anger shook him. "Damn you, Lassiter. You've got to help me. How did you arrange your meetings ? How did you tell her that you wanted to see her again ?"

"Do you ?"

"Yes." It sounded like a prayer.

"I see," Lassiter sounded strange. "I can't help you, Foster. I feel sorry for you, but I can't help you."

"Why not ? Can't you understand, Lassiter ? Forget that I flogged you, forget that you hate me, forget everything but that I met a woman, and I want to meet her more than anything else in the world."

"More than going home ?"

Foster hesitated. "Must it mean that ?"

"It may do."

"I see," dully he rose to his feet. "Thanks anyway. I'm sorry about this morning, does it hurt bad ?"

"It doesn't matter—now."

Foster looked down at the vague blackness against the dim patch of the sheet. "What do you mean ?"

"Nothing. Goodnight."

"Goodnight," he hesitated a moment, then fumbled his careful way back to the adjoining barrack room. Once he thought he heard a sound, the quick hiss of indrawn breath, for a moment he stood poised on one foot, eyes straining to penetrate the thick darkness. Finally he shrugged, groped his way to his cot.

He was a long time falling asleep.

Ken sucked at an empty pipe, stared through the double wire mesh and plastic window, and frowned at the flimsy sheet of paper before him. Not for the first time he felt keenly the helplessness of his position. He had a dozen technicians in his charge, Harrison had two hundred men. The balance of power was ludicrous, and unworkable. Someone tapped on the door.

"Come in," Ken called. For once he was glad of an interruption. The doctor eased through the door, stared around the empty room.

"Sorry," he apologised, "I was looking for Lassiter. Have you seen him ?"

"Lassiter ?" Ken frowned. "No. Why should I have done ?"

"Well you're the psychologist, I'm only the doctor. I wanted to have a look at his back."

"I see," Ken nodded. "The man who was flogged. No, I haven't seen him. What made you think I had ?"

"It's logical, isn't it ? After what happened to him he'll be in need of

psychological treatment. Modern treatment I mean, not the old type of 'spare the rod, etc.'"

Ken laughed. "I had let it slip my mind. Ask him to drop in when you've finished with him, will you?"

The doctor nodded, left the room and reluctantly Ken turned to his desk again. Abruptly the door jerked open, slammed shut. Harrison glared about the room.

"Where is he?"

"Who?" snapped Ken, angrily.

"You know who. Lassiter. I guessed that he'd come whining to you for help. Where is he?"

"How the hell do I know?" Ken barked. "He's one of your men, not mine, what's the matter with him anyway?" Suddenly realisation came, he stared at Harrison, and grinned sardonically. "He's deserted."

"No," blustered the red faced commander. "He wouldn't dare," he slumped into a chair. "We just can't find him," he said uncertainly.

"He's deserted," Ken repeated. "I warned you of what would happen. I was right. Lassiter's gone."

Harrison ran thick fingers through his grizzled hair. "Maybe you're right," he admitted. Anger swelled his neck. "I'll teach him. I'll flog the flesh from his bones. I'll work him until he drops. I'll refuse him passage back home," he bared his teeth. "There'll be no more desertions."

"Yes there will," Ken snapped. "This is only the beginning. I've noticed the drop in morale, your men are getting homesick. Restless. Woman hungry. It only wants one successful example and they will filter away," he stared at the angry commander. "At least they will if they don't get a more intelligent Commanding Officer."

"What!"

For a moment Ken thought that Harrison would strike him. Unconsciously he tensed, leg muscles tightening, ready to hurl him away from the expected blow.

"Steady," he snapped. "Listen to me. I warned you what would happen. You can't treat men as you have been without asking for trouble. Harsh discipline. Senseless routine patrols. The insistence on the unhumanity of the natives, when all their instincts tell them that you are wrong. Finally the flogging. Did you think that intelligent men, and they are intelligent, would accept that? By lowering one, you lowered them all. They feel guilty, ashamed, they hate themselves, but they need a scapegoat. You are the scapegoat."

"You fool!" Harrison sneered. "You utter fool! What do you know of men? You only know diseased minds. I've handled men all my life. Soldiered in a dozen countries. I know how to handle them. Discipline! Discipline and more discipline. Keep them busy. Keep them from thinking too much. It was good enough for three years, it will be good enough for a further two."

"No," protested Ken. "No."

"What do you know about it? You and your petty handful of sickly technicians? We can conquer Venus without you. We will conquer Venus."

"I see," said Ken. He slumped back into his chair, anger draining away as understanding came. "You poor fool! You poor blind fool."

Abruptly a siren wailed across the compound.

The radio officer threw them a quick grin as they tumbled into his shack. Overhead the umbrella of the radar beam swung a little as he delicately touched the controls.

"They're early this time," he grunted absently. "Didn't expect them for a week. Nearly surprised me out of my skin when I heard the radio call."

"How far out?" snapped Harrison.

"Not far. Within five hundred at least. Hard to tell."

Ken sighed. Stepping to the door of the low hut he stared hard at the solid sheet of thick cloud, eternally shielding the planet. He didn't envy the crew of the approaching ship. For the last part of their journey they travelled blind. Only the intermittent signal of the radio beam guiding them to the landing field.

A mutter grew in the air, high up, like a distant roll of thunder. The compound was full of men, the stockade echoing to the sharp sounds of yelled commands. Order grew from chaos. Smoothly the men assembled, split into groups, marched from the compound. Dispersal. The only safeguard in case something went wrong.

Ken wished that his group were as mobile. The technicians had gone of course, but the laboratories, the precious equipment, the files, specimens, all the fruit of months of grinding work, could not be moved. Ken shuddered as he thought of the debacle a slight error of judgement could cause.

High above, trembling on the very edge of visibility, a minor sun came into being. A splotch of light, widening, golden through the twisting clouds. The eye-searing flare of rocket tubes.

It came nearer, nearer. Sound grew. Thundering, screaming against the stockade, pressing with almost physical force against the tensely watching men. Something broke from the lower limit of the clouds. Slipped aside a little. Roared a flaring note of power, and fell abruptly silent.

The radio man wiped a streaming forehead.

"Everytime they come in I feel as if I want to run," he complained to no one in particular.

Harrison breathed a deep sigh. With quick strides he moved across the compound, heading towards the orderly room. More curious, Ken joined the radio man as he eagerly headed for the nearby landing field.

"It's a crazy idea having the radio beacon inside the compound," he chattered as they walked. "The ship has got to land near to it. One slip, and we get two hundred tons of metal on our heads."

"The beacon had to be within the compound for protection," Ken explained, though he knew the radio man already had the answer to his own complaint. "Without the beacon we'd be helpless, the ship couldn't land, we'd be stranded."

"Not as bad as that," protested the radio operator. "The first ship didn't have a guiding beacon."

"We were lucky," recalled Ken. Just how lucky they had been was classed as a minor miracle. They had avoided the turbulent seas covering two thirds of the planet. They had missed the mountains and swamps which covered almost all the rest. They had even missed the towering fern trees which could so easily have tilted them out of control three hundred feet from the ground. Instead they had landed on one of the few relatively flat stretches of solid ground, in one of the scattered clearings studding the thickness of the jungle.



He finished the short walk in silence. The field lay a few hundred yards from the compound, a wide expanse of cleared jungle. The ship rested to one side, half off the clearing. Men were busy beating out several small fires started by the splash of the jets. The radio operator looked critically at the ship.

"That's a new one. Look at the low flat construction. More like a deep pie dish than anything else. Better than the old dart shaped ones. More stability for landing, less liability to tilt. I'll bet they can even give it lateral motion on the way down."

Ken, remembering how the ship had seemed to slip sideways just before landing, nodded.

"Wonder what they brought this time," he murmured.

His only answer was a sharp crack from the contracting metal of the jets.

The pilot stretched short legs, cocked his head slightly at the outstretched glass, and downed the contents in a single swallow.

"Good stuff," he remarked, suggestively extending the glass.

"We make it from one of the local fruits," explained Wilson. "It's rather a nice drink."

The pilot nodded, relaxing in the big chair. Around him clustered the technicians, the top grade officers, and as many of the junior staff as could squeeze inside the recreation hut. The ship had been unloaded, mail distributed, and most of the garrison were busy writing letters home, eager to catch departure time early next morning.

"Made a quick trip this time, didn't you?" asked the radio operator.

"Fair," agreed the pilot. "We stopped blasting at ten miles a second, cut almost two weeks off the trip," he sipped at his drink. "Things are beginning to speed up a little. Three new ships almost ready, improved design, more cargo space and payload," he grinned. "Two more years and you can expect an invasion."

Ken grunted dubiously. "Anticipating things, aren't they?"

"I don't think so," protested the pilot. "After all you've been here three years, nothing much has happened. Venus seems to be harmless. Why wait longer?"

"It's a new planet," reminded Wilson. "We can hardly be expected to learn all about it in three short years."

"No need to. If there were dangerous diseases, animal life, natives, that would be different, but there aren't. What's to stop people moving in?"

Harrison cleared his throat. "Within another two years Venus will be ready for them," he promised.

Ken flashed him a sharp look. "What's new from Mars?" he asked, to change the subject. The pilot shrugged.

"Not too good. I'm glad I'm off that run. You should see them. No comfort, no decent food, no hope," he stared at his glass. "I suppose that is the trouble really. No hope. Ten years, and still they haven't managed to grow a single blade of grass. Everything they use has to be imported. The whole project seems to be a dead loss," he grinned around the room. "You don't know when you're well off."

"I don't know," demurred Ken. "We have our own problems."

"Maybe," said the pilot. Ken could see that he didn't believe him. "I'll be having problems too if I don't get back to the ship. With a two man crew half of it mustn't slack," he struggled reluctantly to his feet. "Blast off's at eight tomorrow. Get all mail and dispatches aboard by six."

A bottle beneath each arm he steered his passage towards the door. Many of the junior officers accompanying him on the short walk towards the landing field. Ken looked at Wilson.

"Think we can do it?"

"Solve all our problems within two years?" Wilson shrugged. "I doubt if it will make a bit of difference. We've lived here, that will be good enough for anyone. When the tales of virgin forests, untapped minerals, exotic fruits and

rapid growing truck gardens are released, watch out for the deluge."

"Then what?" asked Ken bitterly. "Shanty towns—openwork mining—ravished forests. The works," he sighed.

"You don't like civilisation do you?" Wilson said.

"Let's just say that I don't like the things civilisation brings with it," suggested Ken. "To me this is a new world. I'd hate to see it turned into a carbon copy of the old."

"Maybe the natives will have something to say about it?" Wilson sounded forlornly hopeful.

"Maybe they will," agreed Ken. "And maybe they'll get the same answer that others got. Remember Cortez? Remember the "Black Ivory" of the Gold Coast. Remember the Red Indians?" he slowly rose to his feet. "I feel depressed tonight," he apologised. "But I'm worried. I keep thinking of two hundred men. Two hundred men armed with Vennors. It would take just one itchy trigger finger to start something almost impossible to stop."

"I don't get you?" Wilson frowned.

"Tell me," Ken said quietly. "Just how long would it take two hundred men, shooting at everything in sight, to depopulate Venus?"

"A long time I'd say," Wilson answered uneasily. "A few years at least."

"Could we say two years?" Ken nodded at Wilson's startled face. "Good-night."

He walked slowly into the insect droning night.

The men stood assembled in the first light of dawn. Even though the sun had not yet really warmed the air, the heat was stifling. Shirts stuck to backs, webbing cut into sweat-softened skin. Heat irritation made legs and arms twitch with a thousand prickles. An orderly officer called the roll.

"Sergeant Fox."

"Here."

"Sergeant Brown."

"Here."

"Sergeant Foster."

No answer.

"Sergeant Foster?" The Officer looked up irritably. "Has anyone seen Sergeant Foster?"

A corporal stepped forward.

"Yes? What is it?"

"Sergeant Foster left his hut last night, sir."

"Was he sick?"

"No, sir."

"I see," the officer bit his lip. "Sergeant Brown, finish calling the roll. Corporal—come with me."

Together they strode towards the orderly room.

Harrison listened to the news in grim silence. With an abrupt gesture he dismissed the lieutenant, fastened the trembling corporal with an evil stare.

"Why didn't you report this earlier?"

"I thought—" began the corporal. "I mean—" he stammered.

"Never mind what you thought," roared Harrison. "You are not here to think. Now, what do you know?"

The door slammed open. Ken entered the room.

"What do you want?" snarled Harrison.

"I've just heard the news," Ken replied calmly. "I think that maybe I can help you."

"I don't need your help," Harrison snapped. "This is purely a military matter. I must ask you not to interfere."

Ken glanced significantly at the corporal. "Perhaps we had better discuss this afterwards. In the meantime, let me remind you that I am nominally in full charge of this expedition. Shall we continue?"

Harrison grunted, the veins swelling in his thick neck. With an effort he mastered himself.

"You state that Foster left his hut last night. How do you know?"

"I couldn't sleep very well, sir. I woke several times. I thought that perhaps a smoke would help, I didn't have any cigarettes, so went across to Sergeant Foster's bed, to borrow one. His bed was empty."

"What time was this?"

"I don't know, sir. I haven't a watch."

"Naturally," grunted Harrison. "I am aware that owing to weight restrictions there are few watches among us. Did you notice anything that would give you an idea of the time? The guard being changed? Something like that?"

"No, sir."

"Is that all you can tell us?"

The corporal hesitated. "Yes, sir."

"Very well. Dismiss."

"One moment," Ken stepped forward. "Has the sergeant ever been absent from his bed before?"

"Once at least that I know of, sir."

Harrison grunted. "Nothing to that. Maybe he went to the latrines."

"No, sir," protested the corporal. "I thought that too, but he hadn't."

"When was this?" asked Ken curiously.

"The same evening of the day Lassiter was flogged, sir."

"I see. Have you anything else to say that might explain Foster's absence?"

"I don't think so sir, except that something funny has been happening when we were on patrol."

Ken nodded. "I see. What was it?"

"The sergeant made it his habit to take the rear. He would fall behind the main body, a long way behind. On two occasions we had to return for him."

"And when were these occasions?"

"The first one, sir, was directly after Lassiter was flogged. The second time was yesterday."

"Did you see anything, or anyone?" Ken asked intently.

"No, sir."

"Very well. You may go."

The corporal saluted, spun on his heel, marched towards the door. "One moment," called Ken softly. "You don't like Sergeant Foster do you?"

The corporal hesitated, one hand on the door.

"No, sir."

"Why not?"

"No reason, sir."

"That is all."

Ken looked grimly at the closing door.

Harrison slammed a hard fist against the top of the desk before him.

"Another one," he snapped harshly. "Another damned stinking deserter," he jerked to his feet.

"Where are you going?"

"Where? To call out the garrison, of course. I'll comb the jungle for them. I'll search every tree and clump of growth, but I'll find them," something feral shone briefly in the depths of his narrowed eyes. "I'll teach them to desert."

"Wait," snapped Ken urgently. "Listen to me for a moment," he grabbed Harrison's arm, and almost threw him back into his chair. "Let's be logical about this."

"Logical? Go to hell," Harrison strained against the restraining hand. "I'm going to get those deserters if it's the last thing I do."

"And leave the compound undefended?" asked Ken quietly.

Harrison shot him a startled look. "You think that's what's behind all this?" he mused for a moment. "Possible of course, damned possible. Sound military strategy. You think that's what they want?"

"Isn't it logical?" evaded Ken. "Now listen. Foster couldn't have stowed away on the ship, he was here after it had left. He must have gone into the jungle. All I'm interested in, is why? Why should he desert? I can understand Lassiter going, it was the only thing he could do. Psychologically it was inevitable. But why Foster?"

"Same reason," snapped Harrison. "Having been associating with one of the animals, he was afraid of discovery. That corporal probably had him worried, and he knew what to expect, so he left before he got it."

"I don't think so," Ken said slowly. "It was obvious that the corporal hated Foster, although I doubt if even he could give a good reason for his dislike—it's just one of those things to be expected when too many men are gathered together too long. It isn't natural for soldiers to carry tales to their officers about each other." He frowned at the door. "I expect trouble from that corporal soon."

"Why?"

"Guilt complex. He has broken an unwritten law. If the others don't take it out of him, he'll take it out of himself."

Harrison grunted impatiently. "Forget your nonsense now, this is important. What do you propose to do?"

"Nothing. We have no evidence that the natives intend us harm. Those men left under their own volition, the natives cannot be blamed. They will return the same way," he stared thoughtfully at the floor. "I hope that they don't return. Neither of them."

"What! Why?"

"Their example has already unsettled the men. If they come back with glowing reports, it will be hard to hold them. Suppose Foster returns, you whip him, imprison him, but you can't stop him talking. What would happen if he describes a paradise? A village full of beautiful complacent women, good plentiful food, friendly men? Who do you think the men would believe? You, with your insistence that the natives are animals, or Foster, who tells them what they want to hear?"

"So we do nothing," sneered Harrison. "The perfect solution." He glared at Ken with undisguised contempt.

"I think it only fair to warn you," Ken continued quietly. "In my report

to Headquarters, I have recommended that you be recalled."

"What?"

"On grounds of mental instability. I am sorry to tell you this, Harrison, but you are displaying all the symptoms of mental ill health."

"You're mad!!"

"No. You are. I've watched you closely during the past three years, and you are not the man you once were. You are developing meglomania, I cannot tolerate a man in your position with such a malady."

"I see," Harrison sneered. To Ken's surprise he showed no anger. "Call a man mad, and the more he denies it, the more he is displaying symptoms. All I can say is that you are wasting your time. Headquarters, thank God, have a few men left, not whining weaklings blaming their own lack of manhood on the nonsense you peddle. So I am a madman am I? Mad or not, I can cure the ailments plaguing this planet. Within two years the settlers are coming, I shall have this planet ready for them. Do you know what cargo the ship brought? Not men, I don't need any more men. Not guns, I have enough. Ammunition. That's what they sent me. Bullets! Bullets for the Vennors. Bullets to make elbow room for the men of Earth. Bullets to win a world?"

His voice dropped to almost a crooning sound. Little flecks of spittle hung at the corners of his lips. His eyes had a glazed look.

Ken stared at him with horror.

The man walked across the compound. He was wearing full battle equipment. Suddenly he flung himself to the ground, twisting his body as he fell. Before he hit the soft loam the slim barreled Vennor had spat sharply. He rolled once, squeezed off three more shots. Harrison nodded satisfied.

"Quick reaction. What's the score?"

An aide squinted at the wig-wagging flag showing above the hastily erected bank of dirt at the end of the stockaded area.

"Four shots, sir. Three hits, one near miss."

"Good enough," grunted the commander. "Continue with practice. Four rounds a man."

Ken watched the slowly moving file of soldiers, a sick dismay gnawing at the pit of his stomach. The humid air seemed tainted with the burnt fumes of explosives. The crack of the Vennors echoed from the high stockade, whispered from towering fern trees, undulated from the depths of the silent jungle.

It was the old story, Ken thought. Perhaps it had started with a man named Halberd. Certainly with one named Ferrara. But perhaps the honours should really go to Colt. Colt, Winchester, Browning, Martini, Maxim, Gatling, Lewis, Luger, Mauser, Bren, Bofors. Spandau, the names seethed through his mind. All with the same claim to fame—they had invented a better means of killing than their predecessors.

Now it was Vennor, the man who had proved that large calibre wasn't essential if you had high velocity. The guns that bore his name spat a five millimetre slug, either singly or in a stream. They had a terrific velocity, improved charges had seen to that. The tiny slugs hit with an impact sufficient to kill by shock alone. A man receiving a direct hit on any part of the body, died.

So great was the speed of the slugs, that if they struck an unyielding surface, they flashed into incandescent gas. With a Vennor it was possible to fell a tree, blow a hole through any barrier other than thick steel, spray a stream of invisible destruction impossible to resist. But, they needed ammunition, lots of ammunition. The supply rocket had provided it.

Ken turned away, bumped into Wilson. The biologist looked worried, he jerked his head at the file of soldiers.

"The noise woke me up. What's happening?"

"Harrison's playing with his toys," Ken said bitterly.

"Why?" Wilson frowned at the flare of exploding bullets. "Does he expect trouble?"

"He always expects trouble. When he doesn't get it, he makes it." He stood for a moment deep in thought. "Call the rest of the technicians will you, Wilson. Assemble them in the recreation hut. I want to call a general council."

Wilson looked at him, let his eyes stray to the soldiers, nodded. Ken, watching him stride towards the laboratories, his gait remarkably like that of an elderly duck, didn't smile, he was past smiling.

They sat around the empty hut, the whole dozen of them. Ken stood in the centre of the little group, his eyes scanning them one by one. Wilson, the biologist. Fenshaw, the geologist. Cardon, the entomologist. Bense, the chemist. They sat with the other eight in a rough circle, and all of them looked serious.

"I've called you here because I believe that the emergency warrants it. I'm sorry to have called you from your studies, I know that some of you have delicate experiments needing constant attention, yet still I feel that this is more important," Ken paused. He felt a little cynical, but with such men it was necessary to lead rather than drive. He was nominally in full charge of them all, but he could only hold their allegiance while he held their respect, and ignoring their experiments was no way to be popular.

"We know that, Ken," Wilson said. He looked around the little group. "I think we are all agreed that there is an emergency?"

Heads nodded. Some gravely, some impatiently, but all signified their agreement.

"Harrison has decided to take things into his own hands. As you all know, we have adopted a policy of slow but safe investigation. We have classified, examined, and in general, let well alone. Now we are faced with a crisis."

"Are we?" Fenshaw looked startled. "What is it?"

"For reasons best known to himself, Harrison has decided on a policy of ruthless extermination of all native life," Ken jerked his head towards the compound. "The men are in training now."

"What?" Cardon leaped angrily to his feet. "I won't allow it. Who authorised such a decision?"

"No one," Ken lifted a calming hand. "I think that I should tell you that I have recommended Harrison's recall. However, it is not so easy."

"You must stop him," Cardon snapped tersely. "If he does that, who knows what may be irrevocably destroyed."

"I have tried to stop him," Ken said quietly. "I have reasoned with him, urged him, it does no good."

"Why not?"

"Because Harrison is insane."

The door of the hut burst open.

Harrison stood just within the portal, thumbs hooked in the wide leather belt he affected, and stared at the assembled technicians with undisguised contempt.

"I heard you," he snapped at Ken. "Calling me mad again, aren't you? Well, I'll show you how mad I am."

He stood, wide legged, his narrowed eyes ranging over the ring of tense white faces. "From now on you are all under military jurisdiction, that means that you do as I say, when I say it."

"Not so fast," Ken barked. "You cannot do that, and you know it," he turned to the technicians. "You are witnesses to this. At the Court Martial, for there will be a Court Martial, remember this. Harrison was sent here to protect us. He was placed beneath my orders. His troops were to be used only as and when I ordered. What he is doing is mutiny," he glared at the choleric face of the Major. "Harrison, you are relieved of your command."

"As you wish, sir," sneered Harrison. He half opened the door behind him. Beyond the panel soldiers stood ranked, the sun glinting from the barrels of their Vennors. He shut the door again.

"Would you care to try and take my command?"

Ken sighed. He had known it was futile, but he was still human enough to feel anger, even though he despised himself for it.

"What will you say when your relief arrives?"

Harrison shrugged. "If it arrives," he corrected. "In any case I cannot be recalled for at least six months, if that. If I know the working of Headquarters, it will be nearer a year, by that time much can happen."

"Such as?"

"Venus will be ready for the settlers," Harrison smiled thinly. "You have yet to learn, Drayton, that men do not cry over spilt milk. What cannot be undone, must be condoned. I shall not be penalised. I shall be commended. I shall give to Earth a new world, free of all potentially dangerous life. The ends, my dear Drayton, justify the means."

"Men will revile you," protested Wilson in a shocked voice. "Future generations will spit on your name."

"Maybe," agreed Harrison calmly. "That is always the fate of the pioneer. But men will not spit on my name. Weaklings, perhaps. Snivelling cowards, weak excuses of men who dwell with their minds in the past. They may revile me, but only because it is their habit to sneer at their betters. Men, real men, will understand."

The air felt very close, Ken could feel the rivulets of sweat trickling down his back, there was a tension in the air, an electric feeling, not wholly caused by human emotions. He tried to speak calmly, telling himself that he was dealing with a sick man.

"I know how you feel," he said gently. "But is there any need for this haste? The natives have not harmed us. Why destroy that which is irreplaceable? There are men who have given their names to the world, made their names into common nouns. Ampere was one. Volt, another, they are names to be proud of. There are others. Quisling. De Sade, yes, even Vennor. Those names are only heard in connection with death, and evil. Would you like future generations to speak of "Harrisoning" when they talk of the



murder of a new race? Would that please you? Wouldn't it be far better for men to rear a city here, a city called Harrisonville?"

He paused, the sweat running down his back causing him to twitch, and prickle. Harrison stood deep in thought.

"Your motives are good, yet they are motives stemming from wrong thinking. I cannot blame you, you are a soldier. A man such as yourself takes the hard way, the direct way. It is the hard way you know. How often in the years to come will you awake, sweating, regretting what you have done? How can you be sure, really sure, that what you intended doing is right? Sure beyond all question of doubt?"

Ken let his voice sink a little.

"It is a terrible thing to have a feeling of guilt. To kill a man, that is bad. To kill a nation, that is worse. What is it then to wipe out an entire planet? Could you live with that guilt?"

Harrison licked his lips. Ken could see the wet shine of his eyes beneath the frowning brows, the sweat coursing down the lined cheeks. Almost he felt sorry for the man. He could imagine the strain of conflicting desires tearing at Harrison's sanity. He had been so confident, so sure. He had won emotional release by his decision, now again he felt doubt.

While he continued to feel it the Venusians were safe.

The day passed, the night dragged on its weary length, a new day dawned. Somewhere, eternally unseen the sun lifted over the horizon, a wide golden patch on the eternal clouds. Angry clouds. Twisting and writhing in the grip of some hidden turbulence. Layer upon layer, shredding, coiling, massing, breaking, but never wholly breaking, never showing the unshielded sun, or the momentary glory of clear sky.

Ken stepped from his sleeping quarters, sniffed at the air, squinted at the boiling clouds, shrugged irritably.

"Feels as if a storm's due to break," he said to Wilson. The biologist grunted agreement.

"Quicker the better. It needs something to clear the air, my nerves are jumping all over."

Ken nodded. Emotions could be disturbed by climate as easily as by human relationships. A storm, by its psychological effect, would make his work much easier.

Men marched across the compound. Officers bawled orders their voices harsh with unnatural irritation. Men glowered, mouthed silent curses, dragged their way mechanically through the routine drills.

Harrison passed them, frowning as he strode to make personal inspection. As usual his uniform was impeccable, the insignia of rank gleaming from his collar. Guards peered down from the high stockade, watching with interest the movements of the men below.

Harrison strode impatiently down the line of assembled men. Irritably he snatched at the Vennors, peered down their barrels, ran a cold eye over equipment, moved on. Standing well away from the garrison, he watched as they moved through the daily drill, thinning his lips angrily as he watched the manoeuvres. Heat, enervation, the tension of the threatening storm, all helped to make the men self conscious, aware of his critical gaze.

They moved sluggishly, were slow to respond to the shouted orders. Tempers grew frayed, sweating officers, aware of the coldly critical eye, fumbled their commands, snapped irritably, men deliberately aggravated the confusion, hesitated, fumbled their weapons.

"Halt!" Harrison roared the terse command. He strode deliberately forward, hands clasped behind his back, head thrust forward.

"Call yourself soldiers?" the sarcasm sounded heavily in his voice. "I've seen better in a recruit camp. The cream of all Earth! The gallant defenders of Earth's bridgehead on a new world! Scum!"

Junior officers flushed angrily beneath his contempt. Paradoxically the men tried to hide covert grins, they had created a diversion, they were satisfied.

Harrison stared coldly at them. "Grin, you cowardly dogs. Hide your

smirks. Haven't you guts enough to laugh in my face?" he bared his teeth.

"Smile while you can, it won't be for long," he jerked his head at a lieutenant. "Full marching order. Thirty mile route march. Non stop. Move!"

"But, sir," the officer protested. "There is a storm threatening."

"What of it?"

"The ground mist, sir. How are we going to find our way back in case of need?"

Wilson plucked Ken's arm. "He's right you know. Compasses are useless here, I bet Harrison's forgotten that."

Harrison grinned ferally at the young officer. "I said a thirty mile route march, didn't I, lieutenant?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did I say in what direction?" he snarled in sudden anger. "March them around the compound for all I care, but march them until they drop. Move!"

"Yes, sir," the officer flushed, saluted, moved away.

Thunder murmured in the far distance. A few drops of rain slapped against the soft loam, warning of the deluge to come. It grew dark, fitful flickers of lightning dancing on the far horizon. Ken breathed deeply, lifting his face to feel the first drops of warm rain.

"Here it comes," murmured Ken gratefully.

Something round and black and small hurtled through the air. It rose high above the stockade, swept in a graceful arc, bounced on the ground, rolled a little almost to his feet.

It had black hair, a white face, a bloody stump of neck. It grimaced, the white teeth gleaming against the black soil.

Wilson retched. Ken stared in sheer horror.

Lassiter grinned—his severed head lying at their feet.

The storm broke.

Rain, blinding deafening rain, fell from the lowering clouds, drenching the sodden ground, filling the already humid air with mist. It was difficult to breath. It was almost impossible to see. The senses grew numb beneath the steady impact of tons of water. The trees dripped water. The clouds poured water. The ground oozed it. It was everywhere.

Miserably Ken huddled in the folds of his waterproof. Desperately he tried to keep the squat figure of Harrison within the limited range of his vision.

Before him, behind him, all around him, moved the men of the garrison. Armed. Equipped for battle. Loaded with food for their bodies. Loaded more heavily with food for their Vennors. Men with itchy trigger fingers. Men, bored to the verge of insanity, glad of any excuse for violent action. Men who didn't have to worry about the guilt neurosis of their actions.

Men bent on extermination.

He couldn't really blame them, Ken thought dully. Even now the thought of the severed head brought its inevitable reaction. Harrison had acted immediately. The precarious balance of his conflicting emotions had received the impetus he secretly desired. A man had died. An Earthman. Someone had to pay.

Ken fought his way to the head of the column, plucked at the Major's sleeve.

"Can't we at least wait until the rain stops?" he yelled.

Harrison shrugged off his hand. "No. It's our only chance to catch who threw the head. They won't be expecting us," he sounded happy. Confident

that what he was doing was the right thing. Earthmen had to be protected. If they were ever going to win a place on alien worlds, that lesson had to be taught. Taught so that it would never be forgotten.

The rain eased a little, Ken glanced upwards, they had entered a great thicket of trees, the broad leaves breaking the force of the downpour. He mentioned something which had been worrying him.

"How do we find our way back?"

Harrison gestured towards a man burdened with a metallic box, the thin whip of a radio antenna lashing the air above his shoulder.

"Directional beam. We can guide ourselves by the radio beacon back in the compound."

"I see. What are you going to do now?"

"Fan out. We'll swing in a wide circuit about the area, shoot everything that moves. When we have sterilised the immediate vicinity, I'll send out patrols, quarter as far as we can reach. Before we can get helicopters from home, I'll have the entire area clear."

From just ahead the sharp crack of a Vennor split the air. Something fell sogily to the ground. A man yelled in triumph.

"What was it?" snapped Harrison.

"Not sure, sir. Here."

The soldier came within vision dragging a bulky something behind him. Ken stared down at a scaly, long necked creature. Fragments of vegetation still showed between the toothless jaws. He made a gesture of distaste.

"A herbivore. Do you have to kill them too?"

"My orders were to shoot everything that moves," Harrison said stubbornly. "If it's dead it can't hurt us," he kicked at the beast with his boot. "Carry on," he ordered the soldier.

Time passed. The spiteful cracks from the Vennors grew, reached a climax, died away to an occasional odd shot. Ken stared at the mounting heap of slaughtered animals. Herbivores, all of them. Some were huge, like the extinct sloth, some were small, scaled, lizard-like, all were harmless. He felt sick.

Harrison grew more and more annoyed. He stared at the heap of dead, pulling at his lower lip, glowering into the depths of the forest. Ken knew what troubled him. Harrison was a naturally cruel man. His orders had been to kill—but he wanted dead natives, not the pitiful heap of useless animal life.

"Not a very pleasant sight is it, Harrison," Ken said quietly. "Look at it. Useless for food. Useless to help you justify yourself. They aren't even harmful, let alone potentially dangerous. Is this the point of your crusade to win a new world safe for man to live on?"

Harrison flinched beneath the sarcasm. "They are unfortunate victims," he grudgingly admitted. "But what can I do? I cannot order my men to discriminate, we don't know enough about the wild life to determine what is harmless and what is not. My orders must stand. Destroy them all."

Snatching a Vennor from his aid, he strode into the dark forest. Ken close on his heels. Harrison glared at him, but made no move to prevent his coming.

Something moved at the edge of vision. Ken squinted, trying to focus the elusive shape. Beside him Harrison grunted with sudden triumph, swung the Vennor to his shoulder.

The shape moved closer, swaying from side to side. Ken heard the hiss of

expelled breath, the subconscious tensing of the man at his side. Desperately he grabbed at the slender barrel of the weapon. It spat, the slug tearing from the muzzle, exploding with a vicious crack against the bole of a giant tree. Ken ignored the pain in his hand. Ignored the savage curse Harrison flung at him. He pointed dumbly down the clearing before them.

Swaying, reeling, both hands above his head, tears streaming down his cheeks, a man staggered towards them.

An Earthman.

He hadn't been ill treated. His flesh was firm, his skin clear, even his uniform shirt and shorts showed only the signs of his hasty passage, but he seemed somehow different.

The immaculate sergeant, the professional soldier, the man who took a pride in his iron emotions, his stoicism, had gone, instead he had developed into something which Ken for one, was glad to see.

They sat on the wet ground beneath one of the shielding trees, the rain sending a dull murmur down through the broad leaves. Harrison, his eyes blazing with questions, Ken, watching, studying the flow of emotion across the haggard features, and sergeant Bob Foster, deserter extraordinary.

"Stop it," he pleaded. "For God's sake stop it."

"Stop what?" snapped Harrison.

"The killing! The stupid senseless killing." Foster writhed in the grip of two men. "Stop it. Stop it before it's too late!"

Harrison looked down at the man, his face iron hard. "They killed your companion," he reminded. "Killed Lassiter. Flung his head over the stockade. Do you know what you are asking?"

"Lassiter?" Foster grinned mirthlessly. "They didn't kill Lassiter. I watched him die. They didn't kill him. You did!"

"Tell me about it," Ken said quietly. "What happened after you left the camp?"

Foster sighed, relaxing in the grip of his guards.

"I met a woman just after Lassiter had been flogged. I asked him about it, but he wouldn't tell me anything. Then I heard that he had gone, and I hated him for it," he bit his lower lip. "I was jealous I suppose, but I needn't have been. I saw her again, several days after Lassiter had gone, she seemed to want me to do something, the rest you know."

"We know that you left the compound," Ken said. "What did you do then?"

"Where is their village?" Harrison snarled. "When you deserted, where did they take you? Can you lead us to their village?"

"Shut up!" Ken snapped. "Leave this to me," he turned to Foster. "What happened after you left camp?"

"I couldn't sleep that night," Foster continued dully. "I felt restless, I hardly remember getting up, getting dressed, leaving the compound. She was waiting for me, I touched her hand, the very first time I had ever touched her—and then we were at their village."

"How do you mean?" questioned Ken. "Did you walk far? What is the village like?"

Foster shook his head. "I don't remember. All I know is that we were suddenly at a village. There were small conical huts scattered about the edge of a clearing. The woman led me to one, thrust me inside. Lassiter was there."

"Did they keep you prisoner?" Harrison snapped.

"No. Nothing like that. I thought that was it at first, but I could leave the hut when I wished, go where I wished. I wasn't held in any way. They put food before the hut, great bowls of soft fruits, a root of some kind, gourds of water and something like a light wine. We fed well."

"Why didn't you return? What kept you there?"

"Lassiter. He was dying, and besides, I didn't want to leave."

"If Lassiter was dying, why didn't you return for help?" Ken eyed him shrewdly.

"I didn't think of it. I wanted to stay."

"Are you sure that Lassiter was dying?" Harrison asked bluntly.

Foster grinned as if it hurt. "I saw his back. I saw the festering sores, the inflamed wounds. I heard his moaning. I tried to help him, but what could I do? I couldn't strip off the plastic dressing, he screamed whenever I touched him. I tried to wash it off, but you need a solvent for that stuff. I just had to sit and watch him die. Sit and hear him cursing you between his screams," he looked down at his clenched hands.

"I was glad when he died."

"Why?" Ken asked gently.

"They had liked him, they didn't care for me. They would come into the hut and look at him. Sometimes they would touch him gently, he seemed easier then, as if his pain had left him. I would sit in a corner and watch, and I envied him."

"What happened when he died?"

"They took him away. He began to smell a little, the heat and the rotting of his body, he was pretty far gone when he died, made it impossible to keep him there. I don't know what they did with him."

"And then?"

"I stayed. I hung around hoping that they would like me. They pulled down the hut, they stopped giving me food, they ignored me. It hurt."

He stared down at the wet soil. "They knew what you were doing. The woman came to me, touched my hand—and I heard the sound of the Vennors. I ran. I found you, and here I am," he looked at them, tears running down his cheeks.

"They sent me back, do you understand? They sent me back. Back to the *beasts!*"

Unashamedly he wept.

Harrison plodded grimly through the still streaming forest, Ken determinedly sticking at his side. The rain had eased, but still the trickling water from the great leaves cast a thin mist around them. Little sounds came from the rest of the garrison, but there was no more shooting.

"Have you analysed Foster's story?" Ken asked.

Harrison grunted. "No. It's perfectly simple. When you have had the experience with deserters that I have, you will be able to see things in the proper perspective."

"And what is the proper perspective?" Ken asked drily.

"He ran away. He returned. He fears punishment. To avoid it, he invents a story. I've seen it happen a dozen times before."

"But why should he return?"

"He's an Earthman. Desperate for a woman as he was, yet still he retained some elements of decency. Lassiter's death must have shocked him into

sanity. He probably remembered his wife, compared her to the animals he was associating with, and decided to return."

"He told the truth about one thing at least," Ken insisted. "Lassiter was dead when his head was removed. I tried to tell you that before. Coagulation of the blood in the main arteries proved that."

"It makes no difference," Harrison sounded stubborn. "They desecrated an Earthman. They must pay."

"It seems a hard penalty," Ken protested. "Must you kill them without some attempt to understand their viewpoint?"

Harrison snorted impatiently. "Listen. I rescinded my orders to shoot everything on sight, because the sound of the Vennors had obviously warned the natives. We must be somewhere near their camp. Foster proves that. I intend to surround the clearing—and wipe them out," he lifted one hand. "Save your breath, Drayton, and don't talk. If you think that you can warn them of our approach, you are mistaken. I give you fair warning, if you disobey my orders, you will suffer an accident in the fighting," he grinned savagely. "It would be terribly easy for someone to mistake you for a native, wouldn't it?"

Ken swallowed. He knew that Harrison meant every word of his threat. The man had thrown caution to the winds, he was hell bent on one object, and right or wrong he would carry it out. Extermination of the natives!

And there was nothing he could do to stop it! He had tried, he had persuaded, he had threatened. For a while he had dared to hope, but all his science, all his skill, was impotent before the primordial blood lust of the average man. If it threatens you—kill it!

A simple creed. It had carried men on a tide of blood from a fear crazed animal crouching in a cave, to the very conquest of space. He had mastered his own world by that creed. He would master others, but it was the wrong way.

It had to be wrong. Intelligent races had to learn to live with their neighbours—not destroy them. The cost was too great, the payment too severe. Nations, races, equally with individuals, could suffer from remorse. Guilt neurosis could be a terrible thing. It could drive men insane. It could drive an entire race the same way!

Something moved in the mist, just beyond clear vision. Harrison threw up a warning hand, gestured, men melted silently into the forest, the barrels of their weapons steady before them.

Ken felt a moment of panic. For one instant he thought of shrieking a warning; Harrison glared at him, the Vennor in his hands lifting in silent menace. His eyes were bloodshot, his features drawn and tense. He was no longer human.

Tension tautened nerves to breaking point. Tongues flickered across lips suddenly dry. Hearts hammered, fingers tightened on smooth metal triggers. Sights aligned on shadowy shapes moving steadily through the mist.

Harrison sighed, his breath hissing from between thin lips. The Vennor lifted to his shoulder, steadied, the finger commencing the lethal squeeze.

Ken choked, half lifted one hand, tried desperately to shout a warning. Something gripped his tongue. Something gripped his limbs, his muscles. Darkness rushed towards him. Through the dimming of his vision he could

see the Vennor falling from Harrison's grasp, it fell on the soft loam, Harrison collapsing beside the gleaming weapon.

Then blackness roared over him.

The rain had stopped. The sky showed the same clear mass of snowy clouds that he remembered, overhead, a great patch of golden light glared high above the horizon. A lizard stared at him with eyes that twinkled like little jewels, then ran swiftly up the bole of a giant tree.

A faint wind blew, stirring the great leaves, whispering softly through the tangled jumble of vines and overblown flowers. Insects hovered, droning with the beat of their shimmering wings, the heat of a new day pressed warmly around him.

He stretched, feeling the thick soft loam of the forest floor yield a little to the thrust of his muscles. He felt relaxed. At ease, physically and mentally. He turned his head.

Harrison smiled at him, his hands locked behind his head, legs stretched full length on the soft ground before him.

"Hello. I've been waiting for you to wake up."

Ken rolled over onto one side. "How long have we slept?"

Harrison shrugged, glancing at his wrist. "No idea. Watch has stopped, not that it matters." He climbed lithely to his feet. "Coming?"

Ken nodded, rose reluctantly to his feet, fell into step beside Harrison. His foot struck against something hard. It was the Vennor, a trace of rust marring the smooth shine of the metal. Absently he picked it up.

"What are you going to do about Foster?" he said conversationally as they strode through the silent trees.

"Foster? Why nothing," Harrison smiled ruefully. "Poor devil, he's already had his punishment. Think of it, to be so near, then to be rejected," he turned to the psychologist. "We must help him, Ken."

"Of course," Ken nodded. He took a deep breath of the humid air, savouring the delicate odours stemming from a host of growing things. "You know what's happened to us I suppose?"

Harrison nodded.

"We were so blind," murmured Ken. "So foolishly blind. It was plain before us, yet we would not see."

"I was the one to blame," Harrison sounded almost ashamed.

"No. You are not to blame. If blame there must be, then blame your ancestors, your predecessors, the men that dwelt in caves and struck before trying to understand. We grew up with that heritage. We had to leave our world to find another."

"Talk to me," begged Harrison humbly. "You know about these things, tell me more."

Ken smiled. "Is it necessary? You know as much as I, but let us talk, it will make our journey shorter." He swung the Vennor idly in his hand. "How long would it take for a human to lose his pigmentation in a climate such as this? Ten thousand years? Twenty? Or perhaps it was the reverse, maybe it was we who gained pigmentation. Will we ever know?"

He mused a little.

"They must have looked upon Lassiter as we would a small helpless animal.

He was sick, they fetched another of his own kind to tend him. He died. What could they do? He had to be buried, the climate makes that essential," he laughed a little. "It was really good of them to let his friends know that he had died. They chose the most logical way, but then they are always logical. It was just that we didn't understand."

"And I wanted to kill them," murmured Harrison. "I wanted to kill everything that moved."

"They couldn't allow that, of course. When they realised what we were doing, they had to act. They sent Foster to us, he must have been a nuisance hanging around their village, like a stray dog wanting someone to adopt him. They tried to dissuade him, but they couldn't turn him out."

"I wouldn't listen to him," said Harrison wonderingly. "Now it seems so strange."

"Foster failed," agreed Ken. "It wasn't really his fault, we were all insane."

"But now we're sane," breathed Harrison.

"Yes. It took very little. A slight mental adjustment. A little mental therapy. Merely altering our point of view. A little thing, from their standards, but a great thing from ours."

They walked in silence, each busy with his own thoughts. The forest was no longer alien. The wild life no longer threatening. Ken felt a great awe. Would they ever be allowed to mingle with the Venusians on equal terms? Would they ever be able to reach the heights of mental adjustment that made weapons, cities, mechanical servants unnecessary?

He hoped so. Deep within him he knew that it would be so. Something tapped against his leg, he looked down. The rust-stained Vennor still swung from his hand. He looked at it distastefully. The open confession of man's weakness and fear. The end product of a long trail of hate and savage blindness. He flung it aside.

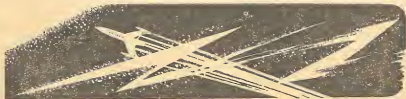
Before them the forest thinned, the faint trail of a well trodden path opening before them. The landing field came into sight, men busy clearing the fresh sprung riot of rain-induced growth.

Above their heads a bird wheeled, scaly-necked, leather winged. It soared on fitful thermal currents, watching the scene below with curiously bright eyes. It flapped rustling wings, circled, and was gone.

Harrison looked after it smiling.

Already men were at work tearing down the stockade.

THE END



Attempting to lose themselves amidst Earth's teeming millions, the alien visitors found that someone was waiting for them. Only one side could be allowed to win the grim battle of wits. But which?

OF THOSE WHO CAME

By **GEORGE LONGDON**

Illustrated by QUINN

Evening sun touched the top of the blue hills. The lonely slopes lay in shadow, grey and dim, and I stopped the saloon half way along the road that wound down into the valley. Below was a single house, seen among trees, and above it oscillated a faint yellow radiance, coming from an indistinguishable source.

I sat motionless, gloved hands on the wheel, feeling no surprise. The yellow halo slowly shrank, dropping down towards the rooftop, and coalescing into a spheroid which gradually sank from view behind the house. A dim reflection on the trees showed it was still there, concealed by the building. I started the saloon and began to wind down into the valley.

The sky was growing dark. Seen across the valley the house had only been a dim outline, and it went from view as the saloon sped into the valley bottom, where a river ran between wooded banks. I drove to the bridge. The saloon murmured across and began to climb the winding road towards the house. Fifty yards away I parked the vehicle under trees and got out.

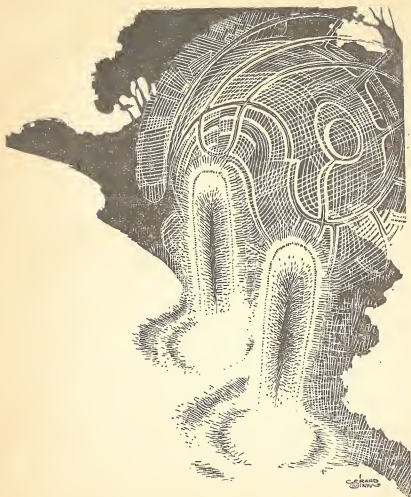
The night was very still, and the yellow reflections that had illuminated the rear of the house were gone. Moving silently, I crept near, parting bushes to look into the garden.

The spherical vessel rested on turf behind the house, but the power that sustained it had been turned off, leaving it a fragile tracery of spidery girders almost as thin as wire, and vulnerable now that the lines of force forming the hull had been collapsed. Two green, vaporous shapes moved inside the vessel, visible through the tracery of its sides. I grew completely still, watching.

Two, I thought. Only two. I had expected that there would be *three* forms in the vessel.

After a long time the vaporous shapes slowly left the machine and crossed the turf towards the house. They were of diffused outline, slightly luminous in the gathering dark, and tall as a man. Only when they were gone from view round the corner of the house did I step out from the bushes towards the ship that had come so far.

Its tracery of fragile members buckled under the blows of the spanner brought from the car, bending and folding into a tangle of jointed wire. Within moments it was destroyed beyond even the skill of its owners to repair. Silence returned. A few stars, immeasurably remote worlds, had begun to



show in the heavens. I looked up, searching for bright Sirius from where I knew the vessel had come. But drifting cloud obscured that section of the night sky.

A green shape came round the corner of the house, and stopped. I sensed its surprise, quickly followed by antagonism and fury. Glowing, it came across the turf, its speed increasing, to catch me.

I turned on my heels and ran, slipping through the bushes and to the road. The saloon was not far. I dragged open the door, jumped in . . . and not until half the valley lay behind did I stop, looking back.

The two green shapes were searching round the house. For a long time

OF THOSE WHO CAME

they passed in and out among the bushes like mysterious pillars of green light, then they returned to the house and went from view. My agitation began to subside. I told myself that things had worked out well, on the whole, and that as much had been accomplished as could be expected. Obviously they had believed that their coming was not anticipated, and must now be regretting having left their vessel unguarded.

I drove slowly back towards the house. It was unfortunate that there had been no time to bring a weapon—or at least one of such a type as would be effective against the beings from the spheroid. There was every reason why their physical make-up should be familiar to me. They could control matter, but were not matter themselves. A life-form totally dissimilar to any known on Earth, they were sentient, highly intelligent, yet composed of molecules as insubstantial as those of the air. My sworn duty was to destroy them. Their plan was to eliminate me.

An opening in the bushes permitted a view of the rear of the house. The broken vessel was gone, but whether hidden away with the hope of repair, or concealed because its presence would arouse suspicion, could not be decided. The house was silent, and I crept round it.

Two men had just emerged and were walking quickly away down the road. One was a trifle more than average height; the other, an inch or two below. They were of average build, quite undistinguished. To my trained eye they appeared not as individuals, but as types.

A good disguise, I thought. They had speedily adopted the appearance of average types of the life-forms among which they would now move. That offered concealment, yet the opportunity for unlimited activity. There was not a man on Earth who would not swear each was a human, just like himself.

I went round the house quickly, looking inside through each window. No light showed, nor was there any movement. Satisfied, I went back to the car. Apparently the vessel had brought two only, despite supposition to the contrary.

The brilliant headlights soon picked out the two figures walking quickly down towards the bottom of the valley. I slowed, reaching back to lock the saloon doors on the inside, and stopped near them, my face in shadow. The slightly taller figure came to my window, and I put it down an inch.

"We'd like a lift on into town," he said.

They did it well, I thought. Very well—had studied everything down to the slight local accent, and adopted it automatically. Everyone would swear the two were exactly what they appeared to be.

"I don't recognise you," I said. "You strangers hereabouts?"

The figure hesitated, nodding, one hand already on the doorhandle, trying to open it.

"We're salesmen for a big business concern," he said. "A cab was to pick us up, but must have mistaken our instructions. So we thought we'd walk on, as it's only a mile or so. But we'd appreciate that lift . . ."

"Sorry—got four friends to pick up just down the road." I said, and accelerated and let in the clutch. The little man had remained in front of me, and he did not move. They were like that, I thought—they knew there was no danger, and sometimes forgot, especially at the beginning . . .

The wing of the saloon passed through him. When I looked back both were walking quickly on after me.

I sped for town. They had not suspected, and I had learned enough to feel safe in going on. Eliminating them was now the problem. No form of physical violence could succeed. Poison was out: they would not eat. Gassing was impossible: they did not breathe, though they could simulate chest movements, when necessary to complete their disguise. They were virtually ageless, and did not reckon time by any standard used on Earth. By conscious will they could form the molecules making up their substance into any shape they wished, simulating an outline which would provide protection in the environment they inhabited.

The proprietor of the next town's only hotel greeted me with smiles, and I saw that he remembered my week's stay and large tips.

"I'm expecting a couple of friends," I told him. "Commercial travellers here for a deal. You might give me a ring when they come in."

He beamed. "I will see to it personally."

"Good," I said.

I went towards the stairs, and paused, looking back. "Oh, don't say I asked after them. I want to look in on them as a surprise—get it?"

"Certainly, Mr. Smith, certainly," he said.

Smith, I thought. But it was as good a name as any . . . In my job one seldom used one's own name.

Alone in my room, I reviewed the situation. The newcomers had arrived as expected, and I had traced them. That there were only two, instead of the three anticipated, was the only error, but it simplified matters. Two would be easier to deal with, and my knowledge of them was complete. They must not be allowed to become lost amid Earth's teeming millions, or they would become a secret, ever-present, and certainly active menace. My job was to follow, and eliminate them at the earliest possible moment.

Presently the bell rang on my door. I got up, crossed to it, and then remembered I had not switched on the light. It would look odd to be seen there without it.

I depressed the switch and opened the door. "Yes?"

"Your friends are just in," the manager said. "They've booked until mid-day tomorrow."

"You're sure it's them?" I asked.

"A think so, sir—a Mr. Dulice, a bit above average height, booked for himself and his friend . . ."

"That'll be them," I agreed. *Dulice*, I thought. It was as good a name as *Diesnar*, and the latter sounded odd by Earth standards. I wondered if the manager had noticed the light come on under the crack of the door. "I was dozing," I said. Best to make sure. "Thanks. Needn't mention me to them. Maybe I'll leave it until tomorrow."

"Their room is No. 13, end of the corridor," he said.

"Thanks. Good night."

He left and I wondered what he would do if he knew *what* the occupants of Room 13 were. Not respectable Mr. Dulice and companion, but *Diesnar* and *Iago*, non-physical entities playing their usual game of imitation—a game that had been perfected by millions of generations of evolutionary selection.

The room clock showed two hours until midnight. That gave about seven

hours in all, until dawn. I had known that my visit to Room 13 would certainly not be delayed until then, despite my assurance to the contrary. Instead, the hours of darkness would see much activity.

I unlocked a trunk and took out a light metal box, which a second key fitted. The weapon inside was not recognisable as such by Earth standards, but might have passed for an antique pedestal of bronze ending in a cup in which a carved crystal rested. But it was not a pedestal, and not bronze. Was, instead, the product of much scientific research, and inestimably valuable. I doubted whether half a dozen such instruments existed in the cosmos. Those that did were in safe keeping.

With it in a pocket I went out and walked silently to Room 13. A faint light burned in the hall stairway below, but the hotel was quiet. I recalled that the manager had said something about being short-staffed. The bronzen object fitted snugly in one hand, and my fingers came upon a lever which could be depressed. Holding it, I tapped. Silence followed. I tapped again. The knob turned and the door opened.

"I have a message," I said evenly.

The door opened fully, and I went in, moving quickly to the right along the wall, my left hand extended back towards the door and on the lighting switch.

"You've forgotten the light," I said.

The switch clicked under my pressure. A glance showed me Dulice, alias Diesnar, was gone. The other—the smaller and weaker—stared at me.

"I was not expecting anyone," he murmured. "You've made some error . . ."

I examined him without speaking. His features were so near average, his dress and appearance so near the normal, that no person in all the world would have given him a second glance.

"You do it very well," I said.

His astonishment, dismay and terror could be sensed. He did not show it—an appearance of terror would have to be simulated consciously, and would serve no useful purpose. Hence it was absent. But his bland expression was not all I had to go by.

"Surely—you think me someone else?" he said softly.

He was moving slowly back. I quickly closed the door and stood with my back to it.

"No," I said. "No, not for someone else—Iago."

It took him a moment to integrate and recognise the Earth oral vibrations forming his true name. But I saw that he had done so, and knew me, now, and why I had come.

"Better keep still," I said. "Where's—Mr. Dulicc?"

The silence was so long I thought he was not going to speak. His face shone in the light; his lips almost seemed to smile.

"Gone," he said at last.

"Obviously. And where?"

"That you can find out."

"It would save trouble if you—told me," I murmured. I took the bronzen pedestal from my pocket. He saw it; his eyes fixed on the carved crystal, and I sensed his terror anew. It was stronger, this time—the terror of a being faced with death.

"Why should I tell you?" he asked evenly.



"Because, if you do not, I shall kill you."

He shrugged. It was well done. "I do not fear death."

"Odd," I said. "I do."

My fingers tightened slightly on the level which controlled the compact, immeasurably complicated apparatus inside the hollow plinth.

"You came far enough," I said, "to this planet. You might have escaped more easily if you'd landed near a large city, though I can guess you wanted to avoid observation. This time your effort to appear quite average was a mistake. However, where is Diesnar?"

The eyes looking back at me were cool, but I sensed and knew the terror and decision in the other's heart.

"That's for you—to find," he breathed.

I pressed the lever. It was no use waiting. The crystal hummed and sang, ringing like taut wires in the wind and I closed my eyes, not wanting to see Iago. I wished him no harm, personally. Might even have liked him, in some ways, despite his weakness. He was different from Diesnar, the leader, who was strong enough for both.

I opened my eyes in time to see the last wisps of green mist shred away into

nothing and dissipate on the air. A few moments passed, and a knock came on the door. I opened it.

"Yes?"

The manager appeared apologetic. "I was just retiring, sir—did you ring? I was passing . . ."

"No," I said. "We don't want anything." I put the pedestal in my pocket; the crystal had cooled quickly. "Thanks all the same. Oh—do you know where Mr. Dulice went?"

The manager shook his head. "I haven't seen him come down, sir. I've been at the reception desk—we're shortstaffed, though I've got a new man to take over."

I went back to my room. The annihilation of Iago gave me no elation. I had not supposed him difficult to deal with, but his companion would be very different. Diesnar was clever, and a foe anyone might justly fear.

I locked the piezo-electric crystal and waveform generator away in its metal case, and stood by the window, the light out so that no revealing shadow fell upon the glass. Wind-driven clouds were passing a weak moon, and the little town was asleep. I knew Mr. Dulice would not be asleep, but watching, somewhere . . .

With infinite caution I opened the window and went out upon the iron fire-escape, listening. An alley lay below, lit by a single lamp where it met an adjoining street. At the dim end of the alley, and scarcely discernible from the shadows, a man stood. I withdrew and went down into the hall, where a youth dozed behind a lit desk. I did not give him a second glance.

"Just going out to get some books from my car," I said.

The streets were as near deserted as did not matter; the alley like a well, and stretching away into complete blackness. I followed the one wall, knowing risks were greatest in the section under the lamp. But risks had to be taken. Agents who uphold law and order are not chosen from the timid.

The lamp behind, the gloom ahead was complete. Cloud had banked against the moon so that even the high rooftops flanking the alley could not be seen against the sky. A car passed along the road, sending down after me a brief humming. I sensed that my enemy was very near, hating me, and probably already aware that Iago was dead. There could be no half-measures in this hunt. My instructions were to annihilate them; guessing that, Mr. Dulice's reactions were readily predictable.

The wall at my back, the bricks rough under my hands, I edged on into the blackness, listening often, and with every sense strung to its highest point of receptivity. I sensed that the figure anyone would take for an ordinary commercial traveller, Mr. Dulice, was nearer. If the moon came up it was as Mr. Dulice that he would be visible. That was how the imitative adaptability of my quarry worked—he had become an average representative of the creatures among whom he sought to hide. That process was largely instinctive, the outcome of an ancestry where survival had depended upon the perfect imitation of other life-forms. Those whose imitative processes had been less than perfect had, on the whole, survived less well. That was how evolution worked, and Mr. Dulice was at the tail end of a long evolutionary period, and his imitation of an average human life-form excellent.

The tiny sound of something brushing stones froze me against the wall. I

realised that I should have brought the resonant disintegrator. The knowledge of my error ran through me like a cold fear. In this job, those who made errors seldom had the opportunity to repeat them—instead, they died . . . But that little pedestal-shaped weapon was special. I had adopted the habit of locking it away to guard against its loss. Accidents could happen . . . and that pedestal had to be checked-in, when my task was finished. Better that I never return at all, than return without it.

Diesnar would deduce that I carried it, I decided. By playing on that belief I could keep my advantage.

"Mr. Dulice," I whispered.

Neither of us would want anyone else in the town to know we were other than we appeared. He would not want a howling mob chasing him, even though they could not harm him. As for myself, I preferred secrecy.

No reply came. A gap in the moving cloud let a weak moonray glow momentarily into the alley. Directly opposite me, his back to the wall, was Dulice. We could have touched hands by reaching out.

The moonlight went. Somewhere in the distance a whistle sounded, and wheels on rails. That would be the 2 a.m. electric-train passing south, I thought. I had not known it was already quite so late.

"Mr. Dulice," I said quietly, "I have killed your companion . . ."

His terror could be sensed, so strong was the emotion. Had he been a real man, his breathing would have sounded heavily.

"There *have* been times when we have let one of you live," I said evenly. That was true—but only a long time ago, when new arrivals such as Diesnar had been less well equipped. "Would you guarantee to put in our hands all the information you possess, of your companions, their names and plans?"

Came a scarcely audible rustle, then silence. It seemed apparent that Mr. Dulice expected immediate annihilation. I guessed that his terror was so extreme that he had momentarily lost the power to use the pseudo-larynx which was now part of his make-up.

"Come," I said. "I expect an answer—in the circumstances."

"You underestimate me . . ."

The words were a whisper—and from high up on my left. I moved out into the alley and saw his shadow on the iron fire-escape, ascending rapidly. I ran to the ladder, climbing. He went through the window into my room; when I reached the window the door had just closed. The metal box containing the pedestal was gone.

We only made mistakes like that once, I thought, running for the door. The corridor was empty; so were the stairs and hall. The youth was frankly asleep, now, and snoring. I passed him and emerged into the street.

Diesnar would be waiting somewhere. He would prefer I did not live, for while I lived he was listed among the hunted.

A clock struck, loud. I crossed the street and watched the hotel for a moment. The building was dark except for the glass above the entrance door. Mr. Dulice might not try to open the metal box, but merely hide it. Either way, he now had a ponderous advantage—that of knowing the apparatus was not in my possession.

A man was a long way down the street, at a corner, watching, and began walking towards me. He was very slightly over average height—just such a man as one might meet a thousand times in a thousand cities of the Earth.

I withdrew round the nearest corner and looked back. The man was following; the distance between us had decreased. Our roles had changed, I thought. Mr. Dulice had become the hunter; I, the hunted. It was a role he would adopt readily, well suited to his character.

The buildings thinned a little as I went eastwards through the town. Every time I looked back, my follower was there. He wanted secrecy as much as I—would play the game the way I led, until very near the end.

Waste lots slipped behind, and a viaduct bridge. I went off it on to turf; at my back was a high wire fence; below it, a bank sloping down to the railway. No one would disturb us here, at this hour. The nearest lamp was very far away, the moonlight intermittent, and the nearest buildings right away down the line.

Mr. Dulice stopped a few paces away. "I didn't come across light-years of space to have my plans interrupted by meddlers," he said.

I wondered whether he held the resonator. Turned on me, it could equally well prove fatal.

"You cannot be allowed to settle on this planet," I pointed out, watching him keenly. "Succinctly, you're a bad lot, Mr. Dulice."

"I make my way," he said.

I knew, then, that he had not got the resonator—probably had been unable to open the box. Had he, he would not have talked, but acted, and his action would have ended my part of the case. Now, he came forward so that we were two paces apart.

"You know I shall have to kill you," he said.

"Of course—provided you have the chance."

He inclined his head. "I make my own chances."

We watched each other. In a way, we were evenly matched—now. Possibly his strength exceeded mine. From experience I knew that one of *them* could summon up great physical power, when survival depended on it. Though not the power of nerves and muscles of ordinary flesh, but that of the interaction orbits of the molecules making up his form, that strength could be none the less nearly irresistible.

"You've often hunted us," he said. "It's a habit which should stop . . ."

"I'm paid for my work," I said, never looking from him.

He was watching for an opening. Suddenly—abruptly—it would be over, *for one of us*.

Then he moved; so did I. My hands clasped round one arm above the elbow, and one leg by the knee, gripping with all my strength. He came up in my grasp like an empty, hollow dummy, struggling. He realised at that moment, too, that I had not fled this way without purpose.

He screamed as I flung him down towards the electrified rails; the cry echoed to the sky even as he descended. It was not of terror, but triumph.

"We were three! There's Piert!"

Then he touched the electrified rails. A flash glowed abruptly between earth and sky. He was almost as conductive as solid metal, I thought. Nothing of Mr. Dulice remained: only a wisp of thin green vapour drifting up on the night air and dispersing.

Piert, I thought. *Piert*, the leader. I should have known! But he had not been seen, nor visible to follow. I had traced the two only. Just such a plan was like *Piert*. He would go off alone. Might, now, be lost in some populous city. Or, again, might be near. *Piert* was the kind who stayed to see things

out—in *his own way* . . .

I turned from the fence quickly, eyes searching the road below and the expanse of turf, half expecting Piert to be there, waiting for me. Were he, it would end *his way*. Piert was more than the equal of the two disposed of . . . worse, could have followed me while I had not suspected his presence . . .

A group of men was coming towards me, shouting. Those in the lead began to run, waving their arms.

"It was murder!" one cried.

They had seen me throw Dulice down and I ran. This was not the time for difficult explanations. As an agent, one has to make one's own way out of difficulties. When the difficulties were of this type, an avoiding action was called for. Furthermore, while I argued, Piert would *act*.

The hotel was quiet, the youth gone, possibly to get tea or coffee. I hurried to the room Mr. Dulice had hired, and searched quickly. The metal box was not there. I went to my own room, and traced back the way he must have gone watching for likely hiding-places. There seemed to be none, or those I saw were too obvious for a mind of Mr. Dulice's calibre to adopt.

I went out of the hotel. Dulice had appeared to go left, and the road was almost bare of hiding-places until the next corner. Beyond the corner was a railed garden, small and sunk below street level. At the bottom of steps was a metal box, shiny and new. I descended, brought it up, and unlocked it. The resonator safe in my pocket, I hesitated, then locked the box and returned it to its previous position. Piert was the type who would keep wise to developments; he might know it was there, and return to reassure himself, or carry it off.

With everything I possessed on Earth stowed in my case, I hurried out of the hotel, wondering if already too much time had been wasted. It would be wise to move on. Voices sounded along the street, and three workmen came into view.

"That's him!" one shouted, pointing.

They had been quick in tracing me—almost too quick. The other way along the street others were coming, a torch bobbing in their leader's hands. Behind, in the alley, would be others. I wondered whether it was luck, or whether Piert was present and had already acted.

I put down my case, waiting. The railwaymen were confident because of their numbers, yet hesitated to lay hands on me.

"We saw him throw the man down the embankment," one said to another. "It was attempted murder, clear as daylight."

I tensed my skin against their grasp, but they only surrounded me, increasingly hesitant.

"Look," I said, "I'm an ordinary man. I ran—who wouldn't, with a pack like you after him? If you think there's been murder done, then go back and look for the body!"

"It's a plan to get rid of us," one said.

I laughed. "If you think so, some go back and some stay."

"You're trying to leave town," another pointed out.

"So what? Who wouldn't, after being chased like a thief?"

They were silent, looking at each other. The enthusiasm of the first rush that had carried them after me was subsiding; some were beginning to doubt the truth of what they had seen.

"Perhaps we made a mistake . . ." one said.

"No. He threw him down, clear as daylight . . ."

"It's a job for the authorities to look into," a third suggested.

I did not want that: the wheels of authority turn slowly, and Piert would be hundreds of miles away by the time it was decided there was indeed no body.

"He's an ordinary looking kind of cove," the first man said. "Maybe it was all an—an illusion—"

Another man had come down the street behind them, and stood on the perimeter of the circle, in shadow.

"That's your saloon in the open-air park down the road," he shot at me over their heads.

It was. I had bought it, as the world could prove. I nodded. Something in the timbre of the voice—something *lacking*—chilled me, but I could not see him clearly over the surrounding heads.

The newcomer gave an exclamation. "He admits it! That's why you'll not find a body! I stayed behind, going down to see if the man was alive. He was dead. There's no body now." He pointed at me accusingly. "He came back, threw the body in his car, and took it away. I didn't try to stop him—he had a gun. He's dumped both in the river, in my opinion. It was quick work—but he had time to do it."

The workmen looked at the speaker. "Yes, I did notice this chap stay behind," one said.

Another nodded. "There'd be time to nip down to the bridge—"

I was afraid, then. Terribly afraid. They had lost an exact sense of the time that had passed. Worse, it *might* have been possible for me to have taken a body down to the river. Time had flown while I had been searching for the pedestal.

"It's all lies," I said. "I never had a gun."

"That's a thing for a judge and jury to decide," they said, and pressed closely round me.

We walked noisily through the town. I was surrounded, and shaken. This was the kind of thing no agent likes to happen. We like secrecy. We expect no outside aid—know indeed, that there will be none forthcoming, and the situation was ugly. There was enough proof against me to keep me tied up so long that Piert could be ten thousand miles away, and then it would take half a lifetime to find him.

The workmen told each other they had seen me do it, gaining confidence . . .

"I still think there's been some mistake," one objected.

They silenced him. The mistake had been mine, coupled with bad luck that sent the late gang off work at that very moment when Dulice had pitched down on to the live rails.

They pressed closer as we neared the police station. "Where's that man who saw him take the body?" one asked. They needed to reassure themselves now.

"I'm here," the voice said.

It was slightly flat, yet somehow absolutely normal.

"Ah, you saw him," the man said, satisfied. "You'll have to tell the police. You're new here, eh?"

"I was going to the station to see if there were any late trains stopping."

The newcomer was behind me, beyond the fringe of the crowd.

"No expresses stop here, all night," someone said.

There was silence, then one said: "You'll need to give evidence. We didn't see him come back. What you saw is important. What's your name?"

"Peart," the man said. "Samuel Peart. I was at the hotel."

I knew, then, that Piert had engineered it, and lied to convict me, and wanted me to know. That was like him. He must have the satisfaction of knowing that I knew, thus doubling his own triumph. In that was his revenge for Iago and Diesnar, and for all the others of his type I had hunted down.

"You're a stranger here?" one asked again.

"Yes."

He put the human sound of triumph into his voice, knowing I should hear it, and understand and thus hate ten-fold my defeat.

It was awkward. We agents like things to be kept quiet. We do not like a town stirred to awareness of our presence and actions. But things had gone too far. At that moment only a dozen workmen possessed the fringe of this knowledge, excluding Piert and myself. Of their number, one doubted. The others were still so surprised they needed to reassure each other.

I halted like a rock, and turned round. The newcomer was the youth of the hotel. "I didn't have time to take the body away, Mr. Peart," I said evenly. "But I did have time to find—and open—the box Mr. Dulice took."

It meant nothing to the workmen. For a second I savoured the terror which instantly replaced Piert's satisfaction, and which could be sensed with a feeling of almost physical impact. He had been clever, getting a job at the hotel. Then I pressed the lever of the pedestal.

Piert's outline wobbled, shrank inwards, and he dissipated away into faint green vapour which drifted and vanished like cigarette smoke on the evening air.

"Strewth!" a workman breathed.

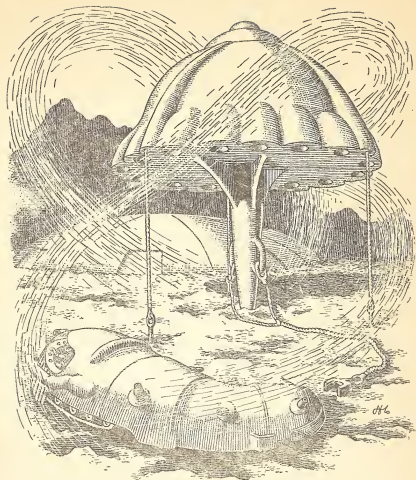
I walked through them and ran. My feet made no sound. I heard their shouts as I reached my saloon, but lost them as I drove for the valley. It had been an untidy case, I thought, but the workmen would end up doubting their own eyes . . .

I lifted my vessel, a mere lattice structure of girders thin as wire, from the water, set it on the bank, and put up the force screens. My human shape, replica of the lifeforms amid which I had moved, began to vanish. I glided into the vessel, set now for the Dog Star.

We police from Sirius do not like outlaws to prey upon unsuspecting worlds, however remote.

THE END





The enormous pressures on the giant outer planets will be an adequate foil for Man's questing feet, but it may be possible to mine precious metals by remote control.

WHERE NO MAN WALKS

By E. R. JAMES

Illustrated by HUNTER

NEW WORLDS

In the administration office of the Uranus Opencast Mining Corporation, a bell trilled.

Derrick Crocker, resting thoughtfully in the straps of his mechanical limbs, lifted his head. A jerk of his stomach muscles set one of the caterpillar tracks that served him for legs in brief motion. A pull of his shoulder muscles lifted his metal arms to the wall rail to steady himself. He leaned forward.

At the metal desk of the office, Arnold Quillan, lean with the gauntness of those who never put on weight, caught the message container as it came up through the floor from Communications.

He slid out the paper, frowned as he read and reached for the desk pencil. His reply written, he watched the magnetised pencil wriggle back across the desk top to its place.

He sighed and pushed the message back into the container, sending it down.

Derrick let go of the wall rail and his caterpillar tracks carried him into the office. Arnold's deep set eyes watched his approach. "You know," he muttered irrelevantly, "you've got us all beat with those metal and rubber pins of yours." He lifted the bar from across his legs and stood up, catching hold of the wall rail as he did so.

Derrick pointed a metal arm at the hole through to communications. "Message from Munro on the supply ship I suppose?"

"Yes. We've three days left before he gets here." Arnold's face seemed more gaunt than ever. "Do you really think they expect us to increase our shipments of diamonds?"

"What else? Munro's a big noise now, remember. He isn't making a four month's voyage from Mars for the fun of it. We've got to open up that new seam." He urged Arnold towards the control room ramp.

But Arnold resisted the thrust of the metal arm. "But last time . . ."

"Forget last time." Derrick's square face set like a mask of strength. "I'll not get mangled up again. Don't be a fool."

"Steady, Derrick. Remember I'm Manager—"

"I am remembering, Arnold." Derrick's eyes smouldered sombrely. "And I like it that way. You know well enough that the Three Worlds are building ships just as fast as they can . . ." He paused, looking over his shoulder out through the observation dome beyond the office. Uranus, from that position beside the desk, filled the entire sky.

Its greenish light coloured the floor and seats of the dome. Its apparent rotation above the mining station was clearly visible as Derrick's gaze passed on where he knew the new mining site to be. There, on a tremendous fold of rock, reaching above the near-solid gases of the lower atmosphere, the scanners had located a new region of blue clay.

Man, with all his marvels, had still not made synthetic jewels of useful size. Here, on this alien world with its enormous pressures and once enormous temperatures there were entire strata of diamonds. Diamonds for tools and engines—and particularly for bearings and spindles on space-going craft that were subjected to the violent, long lasting strains of interplanetary travel.

He turned back to Arnold grimly. "The stuff's there, waiting for us. We know it, and the Board knows we know it. Munro will say it nicely, because he worked with us on that first seam, but the fact remains this is a business. If you won't get the stuff, they'll send out someone who will."

"All right," muttered Arnold. "I know. You're the Advisory Engineer."

He turned and, with the ease of long practice, shuffled down the ramp below the surface of the inmost moon of Uranus, with only an occasional touch on the wall rail to counteract the almost non-existent gravity.

Derrick, held down to the metal surface by the magnets within his caterpillars, kept easily at the Manager's side.

Neither spoke until they were almost at the in-swinging doors of the lower levels. "We'll try remote, first," said Arnold determinedly.

Derrick shrugged. "You're the Manager."

They thrust open the girdered doors—doors that, in the event of a direct meteor hit on the surface level, would seal automatically—and entered the noise and bustle of the control.

Derrick noted that the shift supervisor had been watching the doors from his central cubicle. Already he was beckoning to the assistant supervisor to take over. News travels fast in a tiny, isolated community such as theirs.

Derrick wondered if the mechanical scouts would be any more use than on the three other tests they'd run since they'd sunk the O.P. the five hundred miles through the atmosphere to the top of the rock fold.

Leaving Arnold to make the final arrangements with the supervisor, he quickened his speed, crossing the floor to the nearer arm of the semi-circle of remote control panels.

None of the operators noticed him. Intent upon the scenes before the machines they operated 80,000 miles below on the storm lashed mountain range, they sweated in tense silence while the work went on.

The excavations group inspector shuffled up to Derrick as he paused to watch over the operators' shoulders. Derrick nodded to him. "Hail worse than usual. What's current speed in this belt?"

"Hundred and two." The inspector's restless eyes flickered briefly at Derrick. "It's washing away all the small stuff for us." He paused as the operator at the No. 4 panel suddenly flung up his arms. "Machines too. Excuse me—"

Derrick sped to the side of the frightened man. One became so immersed in operating the remotes, that nerves, strained by the impression of 'being there,' cracked.

Eyes tightly shut, trembling all over, the man grabbed at Derrick's metal arms. "Help me! Help!" he was moaning.

Derrick snapped him out of it. The inspector slid down into the vacated seat, pressing the button summoning the relief operator.

Derrick watched the shaken man shuffle off. It was no wonder men got top space rates here. Physically there was little danger; mentally the strain was almost beyond human endurance.

He looked up at the master screen picturing the excavation area. Considering the howling gale down there, a lot of rubble was being shifted. But it wasn't good enough. Not to satisfy the boom in ship building. The inspector was running a new "louse" out of the automatic mining garage. "Louse" was a good description. Its segments hugged the uneven ground as, flat and heavy, it churned out of the lee side of the garage.

The relief was shuffling up. Derrick watched the view from the "louse's" TV camera as it went into action beside the others, planting explosives, drawing back, waiting while the blast was swept away in the greenish hail-filled haze, and then jolting forward to bulldoze away debris from the blue-clay

covering the diamond seam.

Presently he passed on along the line. Always there was wind, but today it was really bad. And, on Uranus where everything was ten times Earth-size, really bad was incredible. They would be splitting none of the seam, for fear of the diamonds being carried away, until the wind was down to a normal breeze of less than fifty per. It was a good thing there was a back log of jewel fragments to be carried to the automatic rockets shuttling up. All the operators were intent on the scenes before their machines, too absorbed in their tasks to notice him.

At length he looked across at the new, partly assembled semi-circle of remotes that would control operations on the second lode-bearing mountain chain. Mechanics, electricians and electronics men worked over most of its length, but at the right hand arm, Arnold and the supervisor were talking and watching the general scanner of the O.P., as they held on to the rail in front of two fully assembled control panels.

Derrick tracked across to them and ran straight into his position before the panel prepared for him, beside the swivel seat already adjusted for Arnold.

He too looked up at the screen above the panels. Visibility fifty feet: excellent for a depth of three hundred odd miles below the level of the first opencast. Current speed forty m.p.h. H'm. Allowing for the extra pressure of this depth, that was nasty. His eyes glanced at the other instruments recording information transmitted up from the O.P. It was the current speed that was making Arnold hesitate. If the O.P. had been any other shape than a flattened dome, it would have been swept away by the sheer weight of gases compressed to a consistency of light oil.

The scene shuddered and shadows cast by the violent turbulence danced away over the worn surface of the rock, carrying a few loose stones away into the greenish murk.

"See that?" said Arnold tensely.

Derrick nodded. He reached out and cut in power. The eye-level screen of his remote control glowed with a view of the shallow interior of the O.P. Arnold's louse seemed to be at one side . . .

Derrick looked away. "All right." His own voice seemed far away as his tenseness grew. Half his mind was already down there. "We'll run out a single scout—"

"But Derrick— Derrick, does it stand a chance in that flow of compressed gases?"

"That," muttered Derrick grimly, "is just what we need to know. All the experience we gained at Opencast One may be useless. We have to find out." He settled his torso in the harness and picked up the headphones.

The booming sounds of compressed gases filled his mind as he turned back to the screen.

Now he seemed really there. The concave screen before him was the wind-screen of the scout. Ten feet before him, the curved wall of the O.P. was billowing resiliently out, more like canvas than the metal sheets it actually was.

He set his mouth, braced himself and flung the switch to open the panel on the lee side of the O.P.

It slid away, showing the twisting, violent eddies racing away into the bilious green hell of an atmosphere that was mostly methane, hydrogen and

helium. He opened the throttle and the cabin floor swayed with the movement of the jointed segments as they clung low upon the weather-worn rock.

Sound boomed deafeningly as he passed outside. The motor growled behind him with changing load as he cut out the left caterpillar track and turned the twenty foot louse in half its own length, with the segments grating all around the cabin.

Forward, edging out around the side of the O.P. into the teeth of the current. Shadows cast by additional compression, caused by his appearance, smeared the rock with flickering shadows. The louse shuddered, but low built as she was, she crept forward surely.

Clear of the O.P., Derrick sighed with relief. The 3,000 mile depths of the atmosphere above the surface glaciers of Uranus were still and silent, with even the light gases of hydrogen and helium solidified by the vast muffling weight above; only near the comparatively rarified upper levels of the atmosphere—in which they had made their first blue-clay strike—were there storms. At his present level, in spite of the rotational motion of the more or less permanent wind belt above and the gale further disturbing it, friction would always slow current speed to something between the two extremes.

He worked the louse steadily around until she was broadside to the current. Eddies streamed from the curved windscreens, but she held steady. He felt sweat start on his forehead and gather coldly upon his back.

Advancing steadily, he watched distance indicator, gyro-compass and the rock outside by turns.

Suddenly the cracked surface of the blue clay was swaying towards his caterpillars. He ran out on to it and stopped. A probe thrust down and picked up a sample from below the skirt of the louse. He examined it in normal light through an inspection panel between his feet. Blue clay all right. He made a pattern of echo soundings, and the hidden diamond seam a few feet below marked his screen in a curve. This was only the beginning of the strata. It was a fault, not worth working. The problem was to locate the main level of the strata where it approached the surface near enough to be a commercial proposition.

He felt the louse lift uneasily beneath his feet. The dry clay was being powdered by the additional current friction at the side of the louse. Like smoke it was rising over the cabin. He urged the machine forward, echoing as he went, picking his way, thankful as the feathering dust died away, trying to distinguish solid surface from debris choked holes.

Sweat tricked down his back. Surely the current speed was still increasing. How close to exactness were their calculations? Were the echo-sounders functioning properly? So little was known of the behaviour of substances at a pressure such as now surrounded the louse.

The floor heaved sideways, hesitated, heaved. The scene before him tilted dizzily. He was being overturned. The boom of the current over the mountain range suddenly increased beyond all proportion. He clung desperately to the control panel, fighting to get the louse down on her caterpillars. Then he noticed that he was being swept sideways and, knowing now that he was clear of the surface and floating in spite of the leadweight of the louse, he knocked at the cut off switch—

And woke to reality with sweat pouring down his face, his heart pounding wildly, chilled by the fantastic thought of plunging slowly down, down until

the louse was crushed flat and he was nothing but a freezing smear upon a crumpled tortoise of metal, down, down, very slowly, pushing between crowded, almost motionless molecules and atoms of gases and "free" substances until, at length . . . But the depths were unknown even yet—

He wiped his face and looked up at Arnold's anxious face. "No good!" he gasped. "Waste of time—and machines." He wriggled in his straps, easing the set of his limbless torso, trying to reorient himself to actuality.

Arnold nodded. He set down the headphones he had evidently snatched from Derrick's head. "What you need is a good stiff drink."

"You've said it."

They passed in silence through the concrete-lined boring to Accommodation. In Arnold's own quarters, they drank the neat spirit without ceremony. Derrick took a deep breath. "I'll want everything ready for a delayed drop . . . by six tonight. That'll give me a full day tomorrow. I don't want to be caught by darkness and be first bitten because my power gets low before I locate the O.P. for return . . . Not like last time . . ." He drained his glass.

Arnold's voice sounded strangely far away. "All right, Derrick. I'll see to it." Derrick gave an involuntary shudder. That nightmarish cold down there—

Arnold put a hand on his shoulder. "Sure you're all right?"

"Yes!" Derrick lifted his head with a slow grin. "Yes. And don't you suggest anyone else going. You know I stand the best chance . . . the way I am—the way Uranus has made me."

Arnold stared at him a moment. Then he turned away, speaking back over his shoulder as he left to make the preparations. "All right. You're the engineer . . ."

"Yes." Derrick picked up the bottle and glass in his metal claws. But he put them down again. A clear head was what he needed.

He tracked across the corridor to his own quarters. First a shower to cleanse him of sweat, then a light meal and finally rest. He called to his man to unfasten him.

Usually he felt unutterably grateful to medical science for his mechanical arms and legs. But at times like these, waiting, with the snap fastening of artificially lengthened tendons dangling loosely at the shoulders and bottom of his torso, it was difficult not to be impatient.

But Peters, his personal orderly, was a good man. He would know of the imminent descent, but he said nothing of it. By the time Derrick had been carried into the shower, fitted with his light eating arms, been supplied with an after dinner cigar and brought up to date with Earth sports news, he felt able to relax.

When Arnold came back, he was ready.

At his own suggestion, to save fuss, he was run on a wheelchair through the passages to the spacecraft bay.

By five to six, he had been fitted into the harness within the heavy, transparent globe of the manual operated louse, specially designed for him.

Muscles relaxed, he listened to the final preparations for take off. They would be a few minutes late. Uranus turned upon her axis once every 10 hours 40 minutes. The louse could be depended upon to function perfectly for some 25 hours. But the descent and ascent consumed so much time that a

single 5 hour 20 minute period of daylight was all that he could manage on her surface. Every minute might count.

As always he experienced a strange feeling of superiority. Sitting before a remote control, he was as other men. It seemed that he had his arms and legs again. But here, in his own louse, he did not have to transmit his orders to the mechanisms through humanly frail arms and legs. He was actually the nerve-centre of the louse, a real part of it. He could do more than was possible to any other Earth man.

"Nearly ready," said Arnold's voice. "Are you comfortable?"

"Yes." Derrick glanced at the intercom, smiled to himself—even ears of metal and dead stuff were his to command. He looked up at the open hatch above him. "Can you hear me all right?"

Arnold, holding a microphone to his lips, nodded. "Loud and clear." He glanced behind him. "We're clearing out now. In two minutes you'll be on your own. Anything else you want?"

"No thanks. Don't finish that bottle until I get back." Derrick permitted himself a final wriggle within the harness. "You can fill the Gravity suit when you like."

"Right." Arnold signalled to a mechanic out of Derrick's sight. "Here it comes."

The rubber cushions encircling Derrick's lower half swelled to prevent the terrible pull of Uranus from drawing too much blood from his head.

"That's fine," he said.

Arnold waved. "Good luck. Don't spend all day down there!" His head drew back and the hatch swung into place and spun into its grooves, tight.

Derrick flexed his muscles gently, taking the strain on the sprung control wires that were now his limbs. He waited.

"All clear, Derrick," said Arnold's voice. "Fire away."

"So long," said Derrick. He cut in the automatic pilot controlling his descent.

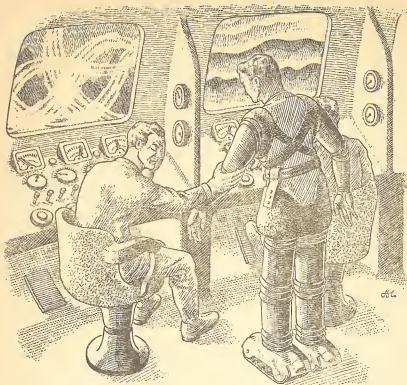
And the springs of his harness strained. The light of the space bay flickered and was gone. The greenish light of Uranus settled into the cabin of the louse. He relaxed again. Velocity of escape from this tiny, inmost moon was so low that no great acceleration was necessary.

The automatic pilot was setting course for the O.P. down there, fifteen degrees of latitude north of the Equator, hidden by the darkness of night, in the second of the northern hemisphere belts, to meet it as it swung around in space, guided by the beam it had been set to transmit.

He glanced at the mushroom-like landing tug ahead of him. The rockets around its rim were all firing steadily and already it was beginning to spin, gaining stability ready for the delayed fall into the incredible depths of the giant planet awaiting him.

After reporting back to Arnold, he settled down to wait, his thoughts going ahead of him. This descent would be no different to the other infrequent maintenance descents to the working opencast—at least not until he was on the ridge of the mountains so many miles deeper than any man had ever been before.

Slowly, as the hours passed, the mighty, greenish globe of Uranus swelled to meet him. The great moving belts of current, parallel to the equator, slowly spread out, ever widening, and the advancing tide of sunlight crept



around the giant planet towards his point of contact. The extreme tilt of its axis was not readily apparent to him with only the blackness of space and the stars and the several moons as reference points.

The swinging of the tug and louse, as the gravity pull of Uranus took over control of them, turned his world about. He watched the planet grow through the rear-pointing TV.

With his heart-beats drumming in his ears and his muscles sagging and his entrails heavy against the pit of his stomach, he struggled to keep his consciousness. Uranus's gravity was so very much greater than Earth's. A giant planet. And he was accustomed to the relative non-gravitational field of the inmost moon—a mere pinhead when compared with its mighty captor.

Adaptation was always an agony, a battle against the terrible sensation of weight. This time it seemed worse than the others.

Sweat started from his skin, soaking into the thin, air-conditioned net of his clothing, steaming into the air of his globe, being drawn out, however, before it could condense on the transparency, by the moisture control.

But, as always, sediment collected on his skin, irritating in spite of the cooling lotions with which he was automatically being sprayed.

His skin crawled, and the itching took his mind off the gravity . . . And his body, left to itself, came to terms with the alien conditions in the same slow manner as the apparent planetary surface flattened out below him.

While the louse sank into the first, thin breath of the atmosphere, the sound of the rockets braking above him screamed faintly. Ever deepening the sound presently growled. The stars faded from his view in the green opalescence. The jets thundered in the thickening atmosphere, beating down and around him.

Earth's hundred or so miles of atmosphere was the thinnest of planetary clothing by comparison with the muffling depths below him. The green gloom seemed to claim him. The tug straining above tending to lose its reality. The drag and turbulence of warring forces chilled his blood-starved nerves.

In delayed fall, eight hundred miles through the atmosphere to the colossal ridge of the diamond-bearing mountain fold took time. The ultra-steel cable on which his life hung twanged and vibrated in the rush of compressed gases.

The ridge swung up towards him and he came out of his faintness, shocked—as on other, shallower descents into this frigid, storm-torn atmosphere—by the angle at which he fell.

His muscles jerked and jumped as he righted the louse. Her flat shape and the current clamped her down on her tracks just as the tug automatically exploded down its anchors and reeled itself down to stand upon its central spike, to wait his return.

He recovered slowly from the jolt. Radar fixed the direction of the O.P. He made tests, current speed and direction, pressure and the rest, to check the O.P. automatics. Arnold sounded as though trying not to be relieved to hear him after he breathed up his report through the throat microphone.

To test the louse's stability, he drove her forward a few yards. She seemed to undulate normally over the current-smoothed rock. He stopped and reported back up to Arnold.

"It's different being here," he breathed, "with luck an hour should be all I'll need."

"Good," said Arnold's firm voice. "Are you sure the magnetic counterpoises are easing the strain on your muscles?"

Arnold always asked that. Electro-magnets, their pull automatically altering directly in relationship with the pull of gravity, eased the weight of the clips and controls fixed to his muscles. It was the nearest they could yet get to anti-gravity fields.

Here on the surface of a giant planet, anything helped. Although he was further from the centre of gravity because of the lower average density of such planets, the weakness caused by his own weight was only just bearable.

He cast off from the tug. The segments of the louse grated alarmingly because of their own weight as he drove her forward. Every few yards he halted to peer out at the rolling rock and to rest his trembling muscles.

Current-gusts shuddered over the louse, but his confidence grew. TV tended to magnify the shadows of high-pressure turbulence; actually looking out into the racing green hell was, strangely enough, less frightening.

He reached the sloping skirt of the O.P. It looked like a limpet seen below water; but the pressure of the atmospheric gases were greater than that of water. He thought of the remote-controlled louse that would be still sinking into the depths; but refused to let his mind dwell upon that.

Tracking broadside to the current, he reached the blue clay edge and

stopped. Actually looking at the sample through the wall of the globe was reassuring.

On he pressed through the green depths. When debris began to shower around him and the skirt of the louse to lift as before, he pushed the nose down with an up-pointing jet and ground over the fragments filling the hole he could not clearly see.

With solid rock beneath him, he pressed on, echo-sounding as he went. At this extra depth, all remote-controlled lice would have to be fitted with such jets to cut down wastage.

A mile along the ridge from the O.P., the echoes showed a strata harder than rock, twenty feet below the surface.

He tried to estimate its extent, forgetting the shuddering and swaying of the louse in his excitement. He reported back to Arnold triumphantly.

"Good," said Arnold. "We've got your position on the chart. Come on up and we'll move the O.P. and blast down for a test sample with remotes."

"No." Derrick rested in his straps. Fatigue was beginning to tell upon him. But he did not want to have to come down again for a second search. Maintenance trips later would be bad enough.

He picked his spot in the lee of a rise, trundled forward to plant explosives, trundled back.

The shock wave lifted the louse from the rock. Blinded, deafened, shaken, he fought her down again, trundled back. Debris and smoke were twirling away in the murk. He waited for them to clear and stared at the shallow, jagged holes he had torn. Three times he planted explosives and retreated to suffer the terrible concussions of pressurised gases. At last he felt he was deep enough—

"Derrick!" Arnold's voice ripped through his concentration. "Derrick, get back now. Meteorological reports that there's a whirlpool eddying towards you."

"Not at this stage," growled Derrick. "I'll risk it. Maybe it'll eddy away as it came."

"But—" Arnold sighed. "All right. It's your life."

His life. Yes, it was his life. Down here he was something superhuman, a being to challenge the might of this alien world. He jolted down into the fuming crater. Rubble and dust was streaming over the lip, showering on the louse, battering on the ultra-steel segments.

Trembling muscles forced him to wait. With the first signs of gaining strength he drove down into the bottom of the crater. Rock. Hard rock. He hammered down again and again with the sampling arm. Suddenly it slid down easily to its full extent. He operated the sampler.

He withdrew it into the inspection chamber and peered at it with straining, bleared eyes. He blinked and stared again, and the blue clay sample filled his mind with triumph.

Now they could be sure. He turned the louse and mounted the crater wall with the motor all out. Over the lip—

The current lifted the louse. Swaying, clear of the crumpled, shifting rock left by his blasting, the louse rose into the heavy atmosphere. He pulled at the nose-jet control. The current struggled against its power. The louse began to be carried sideways.

But now the nose dipped. The concussion of striking down knocked him

silly. He hung dazedly in the harness, fighting the blackout that threatened to rob him of his senses.

At length the red mist cleared from his sight. With sweat rolling off him, fatigue adding its weight to the crushing gravity, he came back to coherence.

A gigantic shadow was lying across him. He looked up in awe. A colossal funnel of whirling turbulence was moving in small circles with ponderous slowness.

Gasping, he realised that he was clear of the rock again. His relaxing muscles had allowed the nose-jet to lapse. He pulled it on again. The louse sank slowly, slowly—oh, so slowly.

He thought of the comparative narrowness of the mountain range. How long had he been out of control? Those terrible depths. No time for any check of position. He doubted whether he would be able to see the needles of his instruments.

He struck rock, bounced on the track springs and went skimming up at a fantastic angle with the blood bursting up into his head.

This was it. Success—and failure. He almost laughed. So Uranus would claim him after all. But—not without a struggle. He levelled out with the rock below. Down he thrust again. The louse crashed against the smooth hard surface. Sounded as though her skin was punctured.

Yes. Beneath his feet the billious gases were whistling in. He almost laughed. How one's thoughts ran riot. Uranus had already claimed his feet and legs and arms.

Pressure would be building up around his last stronghold—this globe. The poisonous gases swirled wildly up before his eyes. He noticed that the wind-screen of the cabin was starred and cracked.

Would the globe hold? Would it hold? There seemed nothing to do but wait for the result of this trial of strength. The fantastic column of turbulence that had beaten his attempts to touch down and stay down seemed almost upon him. But it would be further away than it seemed. Refraction of light down here made it seem to lean right over him, blotting out the glow from above.

He could hear its tremendous roar—

Helplessly he waited.

And suddenly he knew that the roar was receding. He began to take stock. And at once amazement filled him. Whirlpool from the friction between the vast current belts or no, he seemed to have kept his position flat on the rock.

He had lifted before . . . What had been the difference? He caught his breath. Of course. Before, the louse had had the buoyancy of the earth pressure gases within it—now, like a submerged submarine, its tanks were full. His weight must have increased enormously. That last crash had saved him.

The trip back to the tug was steadier than the slow advance from it to the lode.

He felt but for this anti-climax he would have failed to make it in his weakened condition. He gathered up the end of the ultra-steel cable in his harnessing magnet, felt it couple and relaxed. Now the automatics were taking over.

The tug let go its hold upon the rock and rose slowly over him, drawing him after. He felt his last strength slip from him and passed into a state between waking and dreaming.

It was over.

He was waiting in the administration office when Arnold came back from meeting the arrivals from the ship. Munro seemed fatter than before, prosperous, sure of himself. The formal earth clothes he and his two companions wore were like the trappings of another race.

Derrick lifted his metal hand in greeting. "Glad to see you again, Munro."

Munro's smooth face creased into a smile. "Good to see you, old man. Like old times."

Yes, thought Derrick, as the preliminary small talk ebbed and flowed, it was like old times. Munro was being diplomatic with his staff, preparing them for the shock of further demands upon them.

"Well," said Munro at last, as he set down his glass upon the sticky plate before him. "I expect you've guessed that I've not come out all this way just for a drink. I've wanted to come many times, of course—but as it happened I had to wait until I was sent."

Derrick smiled to himself. Now for it. He caught Arnold's eye for a moment. It made them both feel good to be prepared. Poor Arnold. It was hard to wait, Derrick supposed. He would never forget how haggard his chief—his friend—had been as he had feverishly unfastened the harness within the globe without waiting for Derrick to speak.

Arnold suddenly gripped the bar across his legs and sat up straight. "All right, Munro. I think this time we've forestalled you. We've got a new diamond strata ready for opening. It's deeper in than the other, but it's ten times the extent. Almost inexhaustible— It'll take us years to work it out. And the wastage of remotes shouldn't be any higher than in the old opencast. Derrick's discovered a means of making them heavier. We'll be atom-blasting to clear the rock away from it within a week—"

"You have?" Munro turned to his two companions. "Do you hear that, gentlemen? Your task has been made that much easier. See what an example has been set for you to maintain!"

"What?" breathed Derrick. His metal arm reached across the desk, gripping Munro's plump wrist in its claw.

Munro winced. "Steady on, old man."

"Sorry." Derrick let go hurriedly. "What was that you said? What d'you mean?"

"Grand news for you, old man." His eyes almost disappeared in the plumpness of his comfortable face as he smiled at Arnold. "For you too. The Corporation has been scanning Saturn and you both are to be transferred there at twice the salary—"

"Opencasting on Saturn!" gasped Arnold. "You don't mean it?"

"Of course. Saturn is very like Uranus in composition. The same forces have been at work there. We believe that the diamond strata is even thicker. It should be because of the superior size of the planet—"

"My God!" said Arnold. He looked at Derrick with his mouth open.

Derrick licked his lips. Well . . . it was true he was a freak in the presence of other men. He belonged where no man walked.

As his eyes met Arnold's, a slow smile lifted the corners of his mouth. Arnold's eyes began to twinkle, too. They had been working for the benefit of the newcomers. The joke was on them.

THE END

WHERE NO MAN WALKS

The final summary of the titles which were eligible for this year's International Fantasy Award trophies bring some interesting comments from the Adjudicators.

INQUEST — BY REQUEST

By LESLIE FLOOD

Since the announcement of the 1952 International Fantasy Award winners, it has become evident that a much wider interest is now being shown in what portends to develop into an important annual event, not only among the coterie of science-fiction and fantasy readers, authors and publishers, but also in the literary world in general now that the term "science-fiction" is being appreciated by a rapidly increasing reading public.

The universal approbation of this year's trophy awards to John Collier (for Fiction Choice *Fancies and Goodnights*) and Arthur C. Clarke (for Non-Fiction Choice *The Exploration of Space*) has been gratifying. As evidence of trade interest, it is pleasurable to report that in an advertisement of one of the Award winners the publisher mentions this achievement as a recommendation for the book which is now in its third impression.

In order to enlarge on the initial announcement of the contest winners and the runners-up in each section, and to satisfy the curiosity of those inquirers interested in the wider selections and opinions of the Adjudication Panel, the following analysis is given. There is no secret about the voting, in fact, the majority of the judges originally suggested that it would be an excellent idea to publicize their selections, and to show plainly the validity of the voting by virtue of points being awarded for order of preference (*i.e.*, 5 points for 1st place, 4 for 2nd place and so on), the winner in each section having the greatest aggregate.

Most of the judges qualified their selections with admirable expressions of opinion. August Derleth, for instance, after a reluctant relinquishment of the reprint of H. P. Lovecraft's *The Haunter of the Dark* (considered ineligible), chose first for the Fiction award, *Fancies and Goodnights* for "Collier's narrative skill which far exceeds that of most contemporary writers in the field." He then listed *The Illustrated Man* noting that Ray Bradbury "almost alone among the writers of science-fiction has made fiction in the genre human by his concern with the problems of human beings against space." In giving third place to *The Disappearance* Derleth echoes, perhaps, the majority opinion that Philip Wylie has always shown a significant awareness of social problems, and his fantasies follow the Wellsian tradition. Fourth choice was Gerald Heard's *The Black Fox*—"offering further testimony that Heard is a superlatively good writer no matter what he undertakes." Finally a straight science-fiction choice, Lewis (Henry Kuttner) Padgett's *To-morrow and To-morrow and The Fairy Chessmen* "particularly the latter which is fresh in concept and far above average in execution."

The editors of the *Magazine of Fantasy and Science-Fiction*—Anthony

Boucher and J. Francis McComas—with their joint vote, had much the same sort of comments to make. *Fancies and Goodnights* again took pride of place, but their second choice was John Dickson Carr's *The Devil in Velvet*, and third vote to John Wyndham's *The Day of the Triffids*. Lastly came *The Black Fox* and *The Disappearance*.

Yet another American fantasy bookman—Everett F. Bleiler—pointed the trend of the voting. He bracketed together in first place John Wyndham's *The Day of the Triffids* and Bradbury's *The Illustrated Man*. John Collier's book came second, for as Mr. Bleiler frankly admitted "if *Fancies and Goodnights* had been entirely a collection of new material I would have waved my copy in the air and shouted 'Double first!' But since the best stories in the book were old acquaintances it didn't seem fair to include them in this contest. *Fancies*, therefore, is rated solely on the new stories, with perhaps a slight non-logical boost for old times' sake." In third and fourth places came two English books—the William Fryer Harvey collection of weird fantasies *The Arms of Mrs. Egan* and Ronald Fraser's *Beetle's Career* which was commended for ". . . excellent style. I was so delighted to find clarity, whimsy and wit, after having slogged through so many feet of verbalised dullness or hysteria, that I was willing to forgive weaknesses in other directions." Final fiction choice was Fredric Brown's *Space on my Hands*.

A champion for science-fiction, as against fantasy, was found in Miss Judith Merrill, although perhaps only by virtue of her frank admission that her selection was made solely from the books she had read! (It transpired that her few omissions were among those entries completely discarded by the other judges). John W. Campbell, Jr.'s *The Moon is Hell* for "its sober, carefully-thought-out approach, although lacking the quality of Campbell's earlier writings" took first place over Theodore Sturgeon's *The Dreaming Jewels* and L. Sprague de Camp's *The Rogue Queen*. Anent the second choice Miss Merrill comments ". . . apparently, even when he picks on the most ordinary of plots or theme, Sturgeon has the special art of bringing his stories alive. I don't believe in any of these people, and I am tired of mad scientists—but I read the book at a sitting, entranced throughout." Fourth and fifth choices were John D. Macdonald's *Wine of the Dreamers* and again *Space on My Hands* by Fredric Brown—"a rare combination of realism, humour and imagination."

The English members of the Panel seemed determined to add variety to the final selection. Veteran author Jim Walsh was guided by the following logical principles "readability, story value, characterisation and feasibility" and voted these five books in order of preference; Isaac Asimov's *The Stars Like Dust*, Brown's *Space on my Hands*, Arthur C. Clarke's *The Sands of Mars*, Edmond Hamilton's *City at World's End* and Robert Heinlein's *The Green Hills of Earth*. John Carnell, editor and anthologist, listed Wylie's *The Disappearance* in first place, followed closely by John Wyndham's *The Day of the Triffids*, Carr's *The Devil in Velvet* (he acclaimed this on publication as a fantasy find *par excellence*), Bradbury's *The Illustrated Man*, and lastly Wilson Tucker's memorable *City in the Sea*. His former associate Walter Gillings gave first choice to *The Illustrated Man*, followed by the second in the Future History series by Robert Heinlein, *Green Hills*

of *Earth*, the late Austin Hall and Homer Eon Flint's fantasy classic *The Blind Spot*, Asimov's *Foundation*, and Robert Spencer Carr's *Beyond Infinity*.

Bibliophile Fred Brown voted *Fancies and Goodnights* into top place ("a unique book") with Stanley Mullen's Merritesque fantasy *Kinsmen of the Dragon* second. Next three were Heinlein's *The Puppet Masters*, Wyndham's *The Day of the Triffids*, and De Camp's *The Rogue Queen*. Ireland's Walt Willis showed an almost straight science-fiction card, headed by Arthur Clarke's *The Sands of Mars*, and Tailed by Clifford D. Simak's *Time and Again*, Wyndham's *The Day of the Triffids*, Heinlein's *The Puppet Masters*, and Padgett's *To-morrow and To-morrow and The Fairy Chessmen*. An accompanying note explained that Clarke's *Prelude to Space*, a Galaxy Novel paper-backed edition, would have had his first vote if considered eligible. However, this story is being published in hard covers soon and will be eligible for a later Award.

From Sweden, Sigvard Ostlund picked as winner Asimov's *Foundation* ("a tremendous concept and no space opera, with excellent treatment") followed by Wyndham's *The Day of the Triffids*—"an enticingly new slant to the old catastrophe plot, with real living characters and a convincing plot." Other three were Wylie's *The Disappearance*, Bradbury's *The Illustrated Man* and Simak's *Time and Again*. French editor Georges Gallet found F. G. Rayer's *To-morrow Sometimes Comes* the "best science fiction story of the year," with L. Ron Hubbards's *Typewriter in the Sky and Fear* second. Third was Wyndham's *The Day of the Triffids* ("... brilliantly told in a manner that almost makes this nightmare seem as real as to-day's newspaper—or perhaps to-morrow's.") Fourth, Hamilton's *City at World's End*, and Heinlein's *The Puppet Masters* fifth. Fellow countryman Igor B. Maslowski chose John Dickson Carr's *The Devil in Velvet* "because its the best blend of science-fiction, detection and fantasy of the year; because, too, it's well written." Second choice *Fancies and Goodnights* ("very high literary level,") followed by De Camp's *The Rogue Queen* ("novelty treatment of a delicate subject,") Heard's *The Black Fox* ("because of its literary and imaginative qualities, and brilliant treatment of mystery and horror atmosphere") and Wyndham's *The Day of the Triffids* ("because it's 'intelligent' science-fiction.")

At this stage *The Day of the Triffids* held a slight lead, but with two first places from the remaining American members of the judging panel, John Collier's *Fancies and Goodnights* edged into first place on the final score. Groff Conklin placed his other choices in the following order—Padgett's *To-morrow and To-morrow and The Fairy Chessmen*, Heard's *The Black Fox*, Heinlein's *The Puppet Masters*, and Raymond F. Jones' *Renaissance*. Critic Basil Davenport finally seemed to sum up with a selection which contained almost all the first five finalists, commencing on John Collier "... a writer with absolutely his own quality, a unique blend of the humorous and the horrible." On second choice, Heard's *The Black Fox*, with "a novel of supernatural issues with the unmistakable quality that comes from real belief; ranks with Charles Williams and C. S. Lewis." Of third place, *The Illustrated Man* he says "Ray Bradbury is a writer of witch and goblin tales for our day, and he sincerely believes, and makes us believe, that the goblins will get us." Wyndham's *The Day of the Triffids* merits "... a superscience postulate combines with realistic treatment to

make a neat thriller." And of Heinlein's *The Puppet Masters* ". . . this is like the above; they both set the reader thinking, 'What should I do if this happened around me?'"

So much for the Fiction section, with honourable mentions proffered to the runners-up, John Wyndham for *The Day of the Triffids*, and Ray Bradbury for *The Illustrated Man*.

The contest for the Non-Fiction Award was practically a walk-over. No less than seven of the judges awarded first place to Arthur C. Clarke's *Exploration of Space*, and it further received one second place, and two third places. Owing to the limited number of entries for the Non-fiction category, votes were based on selections of three each from twelve of the judges, the remaining two abstaining. The accent was mainly on near-technical books dealing with the problems and future of space travel, and Mr. Clarke's was obviously the bright star of 1952, having since been reprinted in America and chosen as a Book-of-the-Month Club Non-fiction choice. "Astronautics without tears" was M. Gallet's apt comment, and Basil Davenport said of the first three contestants ". . . I am the rankest layman, and they make somewhat abstruse subjects entirely clear to me, and are as enthralling reading as the best fiction."

Rockets, Jets, Guided Missiles and Space Ships, with text by Fletcher Pratt and illustrations by Jack Coggins, received a first from Messrs. Boucher and McComas and many other mentions, whilst other books in this category, although not placed, were *Space Medicine*, edited by John P. Marberger, and Willy Ley's completely revised *Rockets, Missiles and Space Travel*.

The runner-up, Willy Ley's further excursion into romantic zoology, *Dragons in Amber*, was well represented in the various selections, but received only one first, from August Derleth. Another natural for the Award contest appeared to be Kenneth Heuer's *Men of Other Planets*—"a daring approach to a nebulous subject which has long engaged the dreams of the more adventurous among our kind" (August Derleth). The tremendous popular *Nature of the Universe* by Fred Hoyle was suggested by several of the judges, but since it was first published in England in 1950 it could not be seriously considered. Judith Merrill unhesitatingly recommended for top honours Rachel Carson's best-seller *The Sea Around Us*, and was seconded by Groff Conklin. Not entirely a surprise in view of its literary quality, although its connection with science-fiction is not readily apparent. Two other entries are worthy of note; well-known science-fiction author Lester del Rey's *It's Your Atomic Age*, and a supernatural study, *Haunted People; Story of the Poltergeist Down the Centuries*, by Hereward Carrington and Nandor Fodor.

So far, 1952 has seen an even larger number of science fiction and fantasy books published, and one or two originals are beginning to stand out among the others. Who will be the proud owner of 1953's Fantasy Award trophy? An increasing public interest in scientific developments, particularly of atomics and space flight, is ensuring a firm showing of non-fiction entries. Which will be a worthy successor to *Conquest of Space* and *Exploration of Space*. The International Fantasy Award Committee looks forward to another interesting task next year, and to increasing support for this venture which on its merits deserves an important niche in the history of science-fiction.

Somewhere in Space and Time was the world which meant salvation to the alien race, and on that planet would doubtless be intelligent life. Whether the alien could mould it to his own ends remained to be seen.

WEAPONS FOR YESTERDAY

By STEWART WINSOR

Illustrated by CLOTHIER

I

Dropped neatly in the middle of hundreds of miles of nothing-in-particular was the settlement, brooding under the midday sun, its long squat huts huddled together for company in the seemingly endless desert. A pall of fine dry dust hung in the still air, sent up by the wheels of many trucks.

The station's name—before which came "TOP SECRET" in typewritten capitals, heavily underlined—was Wamoonanga Rocket Development Station, and its personnel was roughly half Australians (the home team) and half Americans (who were at home anywhere). It was not as easy to distinguish them as might have been expected. Not all the Americans chewed gum, and not all the Australians didn't.

Out in the open, surveying the scene, were two men, one small and fantastically dressed in a neat brown suit and the other, taller and younger, in a khaki shirt and nondescript shorts.

"Don't for a moment imagine," said Dr. Felix Spencer quickly, "that I don't think Americans are very wonderful people."

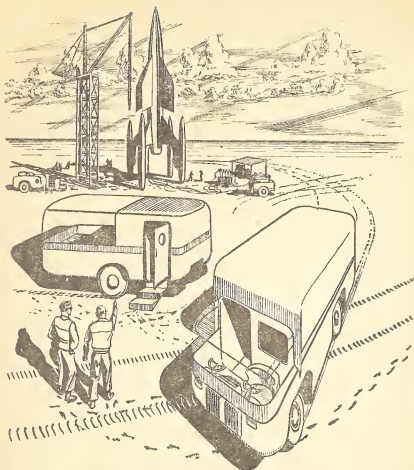
"I won't," said O'Callaghan suspiciously. "We are very wonderful. We have eyes and ears and everything. What's so particularly wonderful about us this time?"

"It's an honour to work with you on this project," said Spencer, the small man in the brown suit. "Australia and the U.S. working in complete harmony, absolute trust, on a joint undertaking—"

"And this and that," retorted O'Callaghan. "Yes, it's very fine, we're just like brothers and sisters, and I've no doubt it's symbolic of something or other. I know that line. But . . .?"

"But," said Spencer, accepting the word gratefully, "don't you think that as we are moulding the destiny of the human race there ought to be a little dignity about it? If half your men must be girls, couldn't they look like physicists and chemists and stenographers? Do they have to make the station look like a holiday camp in California? And," he added, as a man of sixty passed, wearing only bifocals, shorts and sandals, "I don't mean only the girls."

O'Callaghan grinned. "If that's all you have on your mind," he said, "we may be able to rub along together a while yet."



Spencer smiled faintly. He liked O'Callaghan, and he had an idea O'Callaghan liked him. Spencer was nominally, at any rate, in charge of the whole project, but O'Callaghan, less a scientist than Spencer and more a soldier, had more to do with the personnel of the station and gave more of the orders. The station was more isolated and more self-contained than any ship; and if Spencer was the admiral, O'Callaghan was the captain. It worked. Some men, like the big American, liked to hold authority. Others, like Spencer, could do right well without it. It always took a great effort of will for Spencer to give an order.

A recent arrival at the station was a consignment of Top Secret warheads from the States which Spencer was to try out and, if necessary, to modify to suit his own pet rocket, which had now reached production stage. This

latter was Spencer's pride and joy. He hoped it would reach a higher altitude than anything yet achieved.

Its design depended on two entirely different fuels. The first, known to Spencer as Alpha-stuff, gave the initial take-off impulse. The second, known as the Beta-stuff, came into operation when the Alpha-stuff had ceased to thrust. Simply, the Alpha-stuff fuel gave a comparatively gentle impulse to the rocket and carried it above the dense lower layers of the atmosphere to prevent it getting too hot by air friction. The Beta-stuff—which was actually a monergol while the Alpha-stuff was a hypergol—then took over and carried the rocket up to its maximum velocity.

Spencer had carried out a great deal of research on these two fuels and the actual functioning of the system could now be regarded as almost perfect. The Alpha-stuff comprised hydrozine hydrate and aniline, while the Beta-stuff was a mixture of nitro-methone and onthotolnidine.

With this combination Spencer hoped to achieve a maximum impulse of about 820 and thus just clear the atmosphere before the rocket turned over to come down on its target.

Officially the rocket was Project 146, but to Spencer it was YN (or Why Not.)

The first model was just about to take the air. Hence everyone on the station had found some job or other to occupy himself, or herself, in the open for a few minutes. There was no good reason why everyone should watch, and there were a lot of flimsy excuses for being out in the open at that time—but everyone loves a firework display, especially one that may go wrong.

O'Callaghan looked at his watch. "Three minutes?" he said interrogatively.

"Just under."

"I'll get the boys and girls together and get in the trucks."

"There's no reason," said Spencer mildly, "why you shouldn't have started long ago. We know where the rocket will land to within fifty miles. There's no danger in setting out for the spot early."

"Just the same," retorted O'Callaghan, "no disrespect, doctor, but this is the first try. I think when we see it go is time enough to go after it. Kennedy!"

The last was a bellow, but it might have been a whisper for all the immediate effect it had on the tall, sandy-haired man in slacks and a singlet who was standing a few yards away, intent on the firing point. Then, unhurriedly he half-turned, keeping his eyes fixed on the spot, and shuffled sidewise in the general direction of O'Callaghan and Spencer.

"I see what you mean, doctor," said O'Callaghan, loudly enough for Kennedy to hear. "Some of us are slack. Some of us could do with a good kick in the pants!"

"So long as you admit it, general," said Kennedy absently, coming level with them and still watching the firing point.

"Get into the truck," said O'Callaghan. "And don't call me general. Where's Haines?"

"Still in his room, trying to get his temperature down." He turned to O'Callaghan, and said more seriously: "Must we take him along, chief. He should be in bed."

"He's the only instrument expert we've got. Young Wilson isn't up to it.

We'll have to take him along, Kennedy. He can have a week in bed when we get back."

"I could go," said Spencer.

O'Callaghan said a short word which showed plainly what he thought of that, and went on, not unkindly: "Haines with a touch of malaria is better up to the trip than you, doctor, even if there weren't other considerations. He's tough. He can recover in the truck."

"Time," said Kennedy.

The rocket was released a split second after he spoke. It was a very quiet rocket, and very slow, at first. There was just a brief *whoosh!* and it was climbing into the sky, visibly gathering speed. As a show it was a flop, for it got into the sun almost immediately and no one could see it any more.

"I'll get Haines," said Kennedy.

"At least," Spencer observed, as Kennedy ran towards the huts, "you aren't taking any chorus girls along, I see. That's something."

O'Callaghan grinned. "You spoke too soon, doctor," he said. "See little Green Pants there?"

Spencer looked up and saw a trim blonde in emerald shorts and a dazzling yellow halter detach herself from a group that had been watching the rocket and come towards the trucks.

"What does she do?" he asked faintly. "Sing to you on the trail?"

"No, she drives the truck."

"Can't men drive trucks?"

"I've seen it done. But seriously, doctor, we carry no passengers on this station. We're just a little informal, that's all. The average IQ of the personnel on this job would surprise you."

As O'Callaghan strode to meet the girl, Spencer reflected soberly that probably he and the big American, like so many others on the station, laughed and joked to hide their fears. For they were all working on the deadliest weapon in a long line of deadly weapons, each not a multiple of the last in power, but its square. It was a sobering thought—so sobering that most of the workers on Project 146 didn't entertain it often.

The para-esp force grew and forced Lepta forward. His disembodied ego surged through the centuries—he would have to stop and think before he could remember why. But he could not stop, and he could not quite think. He was like a dreamer who knew he was dreaming, knew he had the power to rouse himself if his nightmare became insupportable, but knew also that he had to take it as long as he could. The ghostly future swirled by and became the past. It was never perceptibly the present. There was no present.

He saw the mighty possibilities waiting for his race, he saw their destiny, and he was forced beyond that point into the utterly unknown. There was no movement, just as there was no time, but an illusion within himself made him think he was swaying madly along an endless network of roads, taking abrupt turns into avenues to left and right, passing millions of other avenues that were gone before he could more than guess at their existence. He was not the driver in this mad race. There was some power of direction, but he would have to stop before he knew again what it was.

The surface of the planet was at times clearly visible, and at times it was

vague like a scene through a rainstorm. The para-esp energy flagged a little at these junctures.

Now there was less change, and half consciously he sent an urgent demand for more energy. There was none to come, and he was left to ride out his own momentum. He could use the residue of the force as braking power, but somehow he knew that whatever he was seeking, he had not yet found it. Ever with less hope he let himself coast on, and there came a time when he thought he had failed. This was borne on him more and more as he was gradually less able to see all the planet, only the small area where his own body had been. This now presented the face of uncompromising desert. The energy was nearly spent, and time was almost down to his own life speed.

Then he could remember. Memory came back quite suddenly and completely. At once he reached out for animal life and found it quite close—a creature of low IQ under a clump of some vegetable matter. He slid his ego into the animal, which he dimly noted without surprise was slightly similar to his own primitive forebears in the early dawn of his race. The little animal's own ego was readily pushed into limbo.

The plane was in sight, just, and at a rough estimate they had fifty miles to go. The plane served merely as a buzzard, showing them where the body lay. Also, theoretically, its job was to guard the crashed rocket.

O'Callaghan cast an anxious glance at Haines, wrapped up in blankets—blankets, in that heat!—and looking cold and wan and dazed and unhappy. O'Callaghan was sorry he had brought him. But when secrecy was essential, as few people as possible were let into the secret. That meant that there was no one to do Haines' job but Haines. If Haines was ill, it was too bad—he just had to do it anyway. But, O'Callaghan reflected, he *could* have taken Spencer along. The little man was a good soul.

O'Callaghan opened his mouth to tell Stacie Williams to watch the bumps. He shut it again, remembering something. She was Haines' girl. She would make it as easy for him as she could.

O'Callaghan glanced behind and saw the other trucks following in a dust cloud. For miles back it stretched, like the white wake of a ship. He looked forward again and tried to estimate from where the plane hovered the position of the rocket. It seemed to have been pretty accurate. They had had a thousand square miles clear in which to drop it, but there might have been hell to pay if they had missed that giant target.

Lepta had rested for many revolutions of the planet and was becoming aware of the shortcomings of the body he had entered. It served him for rest, but no more.

He had sensed the presence, to the north, of beings of a vastly greater IQ than that of his borrowed animal. But his first mental exploration brought despair, for these were very primitive animals, their intelligence misused. They communicated by sound waves, their way of life was hardly more advanced than that of his host, and they were subject to terrifying mental disorders which his own people would not have tolerated for an instant.

Further exploration, however, gave hope that these were merely primitives on the edge of a much more highly developed culture. But at that point the limitations of his host stopped him. The creature's brain, when pressed to the limit, could only very slowly supply the energy he needed, and Lepta

was in a hurry now that he felt there was some hope for his mission, and more especially as he was now living at his normal time rate.

He became aware of a para-esp disturbance from overhead. Almost immediately he sensed a greater disturbance from the south-west. The flying machine and the emanations from it raised his hopes still farther, but his interest was directed to the beings approaching from the south. He stretched out towards them—and almost fused the first mind he explored, in his excitement. That first mind gave him half the answer, and there were suggestions that the full solution was not far away.

O'Callaghan and the others, unaware of this survey by what was only to them a ring-tailed opossum, came slowly towards more trouble than any of them dreamed could exist. Had it not been for Haines' illness, they would have been rushing to it.

The big American realised as they first saw the wreckage of the rocket that having brought Haines so far they could not use him until he had rested. It was ironical, but a few hours should not make much difference.

"Get a tent up, Kennedy," he said. "The rocket can wait a while yet."

Haines started to say something, but O'Callaghan waved him into silence. "You look after him, Stacie," he said.

It was an odd sight, the tall instruments expert wrapped in blankets stumbling in the dust, sustained by the tiny girl who looked even more out of place as a nurse than she had done behind the wheel of the monster truck. But she didn't need any help. She and Barney disappeared into the tent, and O'Callaghan strolled over to the rocket.

He saw Lepta—at least, the image of the creature was built up on his retina, but his mind was not interested. Lepta was taking a chance. He had to be near. He had to take over one of these—men, they called themselves. Except the small female, who was a girl. At first, thinking of other races in his experience, he had looked at this girl with particular interest as his possible next host. But the first contact with her mind dissolved the idea. In a mental struggle with her he would lose. He realised with a shock that she would even control the opossum, and be puzzled at the way it would obey her commands, even unspoken ones.

For she had a strong, balanced mind. It was not as intelligent as many of the others about. It was simpler, but in its simplicity there was power beyond his control. She had not the responsibility, the constant confusion and mental conflict of the man who was called O'Callaghan, or the quickness of Kennedy, or the high-strung intelligence of Haines. Whatever happened Lepta knew he had a fight on his hands—and Lepta was not by nature a fighter. For countless generations his people had never had to defend themselves, and only the desperate urgency of his mission—an urgency that had nothing to do with time—drove him to murder minds and steal bodies.

But with Haines, O'Callaghan, even Kennedy, he might have a chance. With Stacie he would fail. He knew it had to be one of these four. They were the four who could be where he wanted to be. He reconsidered. With Kennedy also he would fail. The man had a quickness of thought that would enable him to realise what was happening and fight, not in the dark, but in full, shocked knowledge of the nature of what was happening. O'Callaghan, too, would be able to delay him long enough to clear his mind of other problems and fight back, a full man for once with only one problem.

No, it had to be Haines. In a vague way Lepta realised the man was sick. He was open to delirium—how much more to a mind driving into his, taking sides in a mind fighting itself.

There was no reason to wait. He opened the battle of wills, knowing that once started it must be fought out to the end. Instantly he was in the grip of terror, some of it the man's own. It was the first fight in Lepta's life, but it was by no means Haines' first. Lepta fought Haines with everything he found in the man's life. He fought him with Stacie, with other women he had known, with his childhood, his hopes, his ambitions. He fought him with guilt and fear and horror.

Barney's IQ was high, but Lepta's was higher. Even so he realised as Haines tossed and muttered and screamed, with Stacie and Kennedy and sometimes O'Callaghan watching him anxiously, that he could never win a permanent victory. Haines had all the advantage of the defender. He was fighting for his life, and he was a fighter. When Lepta understood the exact nature of the battle, he changed his ground. Dictating the terms of the struggle, he showed Haines that it was no longer a battle for life. And Haines lost so much of his driving force.

Lepta needed only a little human time. He bargained. Haines didn't know what he was doing, but without his conscious knowledge Lepta fought him for a prize of a month—two weeks—a week. He knew the danger. In a week Haines would be strong. If the battle had to start again, he would throw Lepta off like the evil spirit he thought he was.

Anyone who knew of the struggle would have thought Haines was losing it. But Lepta's demands came down and down and down. He knew already he had developed a new fear, a fear that would prevent him winning any new battle of minds with any man of Haines' calibre.

And when he had won, Haines was strong and well and Lepta, his mental superior, covered exhausted in a corner of his mind. It was a strange victory. Perhaps, he thought tiredly, it had helped Haines that his body had been fighting too. Lepta had been fighting with nothing but a mind that had to learn how to fight as it went along.

"That wasn't malaria," said Kennedy weakly.

Haines grinned up at him. "It's over, anyway," he said. "Where's the rocket? I hope you've kept it fresh for me."

Spencer read O'Callaghan's official report with mixed feelings—relief that all the meter readings had survived, and disappointment that the rocket had landed just outside the area that was meant to contain it, allowing for all reasonable variation and error. The best course was clearly to have a conference with O'Callaghan and the others at the scene of operations, well away from the settlement. For they would need a new firing point if they were to try out the experimental warheads. It was one thing to shoot off a comparatively harmless rocket, but quite another to fire one that would make a bang they would hear in London.

Nothing like a little exaggeration, he told himself whimsically. Anyway, the next step, unless something unexpected came up at the conference, was clearly to fire a rocket complete with warhead to land in the same spot as the last, though from a slightly different point. Any good scientist would make

sure he got the same results twice, even if it was expensive and quite possibly dangerous. So before he left in the plane he had the combium warheads checked again. Combium was a combination of certain stable transuranium elements (berkelium plus element 98 plus a compounding agent of the toluene group) to form an unstable radioactive compound. He also arranged for the assembly of the six test rockets. The final test was made on the microwave radar guiding beam which locked the rocket on its course towards the centre of the testing ground. This was chiefly to ensure that the rocket did not fall near the launching site owing to some fault in its stabilizers.

Then he set out in the plane.

He sought out Haines first when he arrived. When he heard of Haines' illness which had held up operations for four days he had blamed himself and O'Callaghan. He believed that of all the brilliant men under him, Haines was the most outstanding. He was wasted as an instrument expert. Spencer had plans for him.

But Haines looked fitter than for a long time. "I think I got it all over in one lump, doctor," he said, grinning. "I never felt better."

"I'm glad of that. Seems you had a bad time."

"So they tell me. I don't remember much about it. Sorry to hold you all up."

"Well, the next time you can look on with complete indifference," Spencer told him. "There won't be anything left for you after the next rocket lands."

"So long as there's something left of me, I won't complain."

With Haines he examined the carcass of the YN and agreed with his findings. Then O'Callaghan and Kennedy joined them and they made a committee-table of two crates which still proclaimed loudly that they had contained Silver Water Salmon.

Haines gave his evidence again, and his opinion that some etheric disturbance must have thrown the missile off its course. "Of course, Stacie . . ." he said, and stopped.

"Stacie, I presume, is the female with green shorts and . . . other things?" queried the doctor. "What has she to do with this?"

"Very little," Haines admitted, "except that she made the suggestion—wild, but we have nothing better—that the deviation in the rocket's course and my strange illness may not be entirely unconnected. I don't suggest we even use that as a working hypothesis. But when two unusual things happen in close juxtaposition . . ."

"Your point is taken," said Spencer. "I don't think it's possible to pursue that line, however. Not unless or until a third strange thing happens. I take it we fire a second rocket exactly as before, and then try out the combium warheads?"

Nothing further came up, and the next day they fired a second rocket. On this occasion even O'Callaghan was ready to stay where he was and wait for the rocket to come to him. The deviation from the set course had not been enough to suggest danger.

This time there was no deviation, which tended to confirm Haines' suggestion. Haines, having nothing to do in his own line, was cheerfully helping others in theirs. Nobody minded. Few people like hard work so much that they are not prepared to share it with anyone who wants it.

"Something," said Stacie definitely one night, "has happened to you."

He looked at her curiously. They had been sunbathing, and though the sun had long since gone down they had felt disinclined to move. Movement meant heat again. Staying still for a long time one gradually became cool, even on the sun-baked plains. And—wonder of wonders!—there was a light breeze.

"What do you suggest?" he asked.

"I don't know. I thought maybe you would. Illness sometimes changes people, but I've never heard of it being quite like this."

"What are the signs?"

"You're not so restless as you used to be. You've got more confidence. And then there's me. You take me for granted. You drag me along behind you. I think you used to be a little afraid of me. That used to be rather nice. At least, I think so now, after it's gone."

Haines was amused. "I haven't noticed it."

"No, I suppose you wouldn't. At first you acted the strong silent Aussie. You know the line. Lean, lantern-jawed frontiersman. You were about two hundred years too late, but you kept it up stubbornly. I was the girl from the honky-tonk town. You had a part for me too, you know, as well as yourself. I didn't mind playing it, for a while. Now you don't let me play it, even if I want to."

"Do you want to?"

"Well, I'd grown used to being the girl from the big city. The girl who would score a hundred and twenty-five per cent in any test. The girl on the magazine cover. I liked it. Now suddenly I'm just a girl."

"The only girl in my life."

"Uh-huh," said Stacie sceptically. "Since when, till when?"

"Now you *are* the big-city girl. Used to the idea of legalised polygamy. When I say you're the only girl in my life I mean . . ."

He went on to tell her in great detail what he meant. In the heat of the evening it exhausted them both.

No one could understand why they had agreed to launch the six war rockets on the same day, or who had first made the suggestion. Obviously the logical thing was to space them out and learn all there was to learn from each before they released the next. But there it was, for days the plan was to fire them off at intervals of two hours and arranged to drop about 20 miles apart in a figure like the six of diamonds—or clubs, for that matter—and no one saw anything wrong with the plan. That was what no one not connected with the station could understand afterwards.

The range was carefully set and cameras were set up covering the area of the explosion. Radiation counters, gamma ray, neutron counters, pressure and temperature meters were ringed round the area like silent witnesses at a funeral. But this was a funeral at which most of the guests would die, however carefully they were guarded.

Then everything was ready. Spencer and Haines had made a final check of the rockets. If anyone had dropped a pin in the firing tower, someone else, his nerves jangling, would have yelled for him to stop that obscene row. Spencer knew something was going to go wrong. But he had had the feeling so often that he fought it down instead of taking it as a warning. Haines . . .

Haines felt something happening, and as he was about to fight it, he realised he had known it was going to happen and had, in some strange way, agreed to it. He could do nothing. He had given his promise . . .

Spencer tried to look round and could not. To his left O'Callaghan was frozen too. But someone could move. Haines had taken the place of the man at the firing seat. That was right, Spencer thought. The schedule of any experiment had to be carried out, and if everyone happened to freeze just when it should start, any man who could had to take over. It was right that Haines should take over. He would take over himself if he could, but since he could not, he was glad Haines had. Methinks, he thought dully but characteristically, I do protest too much.

He saw Haines calmly alter the rocket settings, and suddenly Spencer saw it all. Haines, in some way, had been got at. He was going to destroy the entire station and every man and woman in it. It would set the research back years. Perhaps there would never again be anything quite like the YN rocket. That was his, and anyone else who knew its specifications was here.

Haines would have to kill himself too. That was natural enough. For Spencer knew it was not Haines who sat there in the firing seat and altered the settings. The body was Haines', but another mind was in control. Otherwise Haines would never kill himself, kill Stacie Williams, kill the rocket, kill everyone who knew about the rocket. Perhaps, Spencer thought wildly, it was right that they should all die, and anyone else who worked on such devastating weapons.

Then, slowly and calmly, Haines pulled all six levers one after the other. Each rocket in turn leaped from its cradle, hung motionless while a dust cloud boiled round its tail and then gently lifted into the sky. Spencer could not see them, but knowing what he would see if he could look directly at them, the shadows he could see from the corner of his eyes were all he needed for full understanding of what was happening.

Suddenly Haines looked round, dazed, and the control room came to life in the same instant. Haines spoke, but Spencer didn't hear him, tensed for the rockets to return.

Beneath the Lemurians' force dome the invading mechanicals were held temporarily helpless. The impasse was about to be solved, but not exactly as the Arcturians imagined. Their esp-force technicians had nearly perfected an inverted-wave field which would nullify the esp dome of the Lemurian defenders. Then the Arcturian war machines could complete the subjection of the planet.

But suddenly the esp dome was voluntarily removed from them. This astounding fact was not completely assimilated by the military oligarchy when their aspirations to empire were abruptly terminated by the arrival of three messengers who had only one word to say—Death, a word much the same in Lemurian, Arcturian, and English. The gaping hole spewing lethal radiations was an awesome sight for quite a while afterwards. The other three were used to obliterate the largest of the Arcturian cruisers which hovered about the main land base. The YN rockets had fulfilled Dr. Spencer's highest hopes.

The remaining Arcturian ships, their force screens momentarily disrupted by the atomic disturbance, were instantly taken by the Lemurian race mind

which had been waiting for the screens to fall.

In a world which was not now directly connected even by the weakest of probability lines with the world in which Lemuria did not fall, Spencer and O'Callaghan and Haines, like criminals after their crime, were trying to work out their story. They had some of the best brains in the world at their disposal—they would accomplish that as they would have accomplished so many other things. Spencer and O'Callaghan knew somehow that Haines was one of them—that he had never been anything else.

And from the future and down a line of probability which was not now swirling down the time vortex created by the race mind of a people who had never learned to fight, a people who would have been even less able to withstand Man than the Arcturians, the ego of Lepta surged back.

His mission fulfilled, he was returning home.

THE END

THE LITERARY LINE-UP

At the request of many readers—and despite the general trend of stories in recent issues—we return to “space opera” for the lead story in the next issue. “Galactic Quest” by George Duncan will really take you round the galaxy with its search for *Techon*, a mysterious weapon hidden by a race long since perished—a weapon, too, which can make or break the human race. There's no hidden message or parable in this story. It's straight action—for a change.

Once upon a time, in 1939, to be precise, there were three Liverpool fans who became separated by the war. Subsequently each has become a novelist in his own right. One, Christopher Youd, you know as “John Christopher,” author of the Max Larkin stories; another, Dave McIlwain, you know as “Charles Eric Maine,” author of the radio play “Spaceways,” shortly to be made into a film in Hollywood; the third—well, we are pleased to announce the first of a number of science fiction stories by John F. Burke, beginning with “Chessboard” in the next issue.

As an added fillip for Ted Tubb's fans, there's a delightful vignette of his Martian series coming up, entitled “Alien Dust.” This story doesn't deal with the broad pattern of the Martian colony, but with one individual—a criminal. Another excellent “first” story from a new writer is “Assisted Passage,” by James White, from whom we hope to see more in the near future, and the fiction is rounded off by “Heroes Don't Cry,” by Gordon Kent.

July ratings list the first part of the serial bottom, but few readers voted on it—the majority preferring to read the story as a whole and then rate it.

- | | | |
|--------------------------|-------|---------------------|
| 1. Men Only | | E. C. Tubb |
| 2. Man's Questing Ended | .. | F. G. Rayer |
| 3. Finishing Touch | .. | A. Bertram Chandler |
| 4. The Temporal Rift | .. | George Longdon |
| 5. The Esp Worlds Part I | | J. T. M'Intosh |

Sign of the times . . .

Just over a year ago, in the summer of 1951, I wrote an editorial upon the current trend of science-fiction magazines which had mushroomed into existence during the first six months of that year. In that same issue were the first two advertisements from professional publishing houses publicising new *books* in the field. Both advertisers admitted privately that they were experimenting with a medium for which there was no known market—that is, hard-covered science-fiction.

Certainly, not even the most enthusiastic visionary of a year ago could have visualised the rapid build-up of interest in bound volumes published in this country, in such a short space of time. Science-fiction, as we know it, grew up in the United States, through a teething stage in magazine form which lasted nearly twenty years, reaching adolescence in 1938, and not maturing until 1946. Even then, only visionary Americans who were connected with the *writing* of science-fiction had a glimmering of the possibilities inherent in the field of books. A few of them—ably supported by leading authors in the field, for whom there had been no other outlet than magazines for their specialised art—launched their own publishing houses to bring the best novels and serials into permanent form.

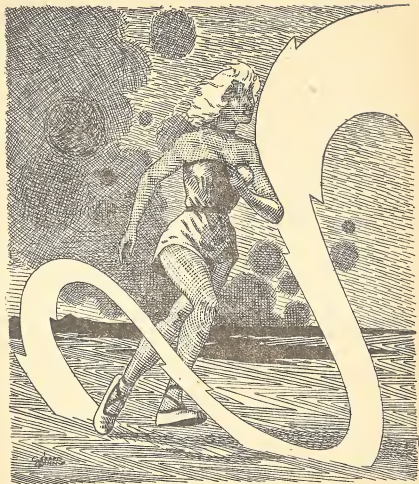
This gave various authors' agents the incentive to explore wider fields, and science-fiction began to appear in such national American papers as *Colliers* and *The Saturday Evening Post*. Helped by atomic bomb experiments at Eniwetok and rocket experiments at White Sands, the appeal of science-fiction steam-rolled into American radio and films, and leading American publishing houses began to explore the possibilities of the "new" literature as a substitute for the expiring field of "thrillers." By the spring of this year "science-fiction" as a name and a recognised literature had become established across the Atlantic.

Inevitably the "new" field was explored by British publishers, helped along by authors and agents in this country who had been closely allied with the American movement. That there was resistance to the coming fashion, even reluctance to admit its existence, was only natural. Consider—the American field had had a softening-up process for nearly thirty years, while British reading audiences hardly knew what a science fiction magazine meant. But, experiments and enquiries throughout the country, plus the fact that *New Worlds* itself had survived the barren-years, elicited the fact that there was a vast reading potential for science-fiction in Great Britain. The two advertisers of a year ago have now been supplemented by many others who list regular bound volumes, and the next six months will see many more entering the field. The material ranges from new stories by known British authors, anthologies, and the pick of American novels appearing in British editions, down to "annuals" and "space trails" for juveniles.

Even the newspaper book-reviewers have been jockeyed into recognising the field—if not acknowledging it. From here on the barrier is down—science-fiction has come into its own.

JOHN CARNELL

In this final instalment of our great serial, Janice Hiller and Jeff Croner uncover the vast plot behind the planet Nome, the world of Sport, and their newly developed telepathic powers are strained to the utmost.



THE ESP WORLDS

By J. T. M'INTOSH

Illustrated by QUINN

Conclusion

As one of Earth's few highly developed telepaths, Major Jeff Croner is sent to Nome, a planet in the NO sector of the galaxy, to command the Universal Order Force there and attempt to establish peaceful trade negotiations with the Noyans. The small Earth force, however, find that the Noyans are governed by a matriarchy and all attempts to establish friendly relations with the women leaders fail. While Noyan women frequently visit the Earth settlement out of curiosity, any attempt by the visitors to approach a Noyan city results in death or injury to their ambassadors, even when supported by armoured vehicles and powerful weapons—the Noyan women having a trick of teleportation which enables them to mysteriously appear from nowhere, make an attack, and disappear just as quickly.

Discouraged by these continual failures, Jeff Croner appeals to UOF headquarters on Earth for a first-class woman operator, but is refused. He then decides to forcibly enlist one of the passengers from the next spaceship which calls, and eventually chooses Janice Hiller, a novelist who is roaming the galaxy in search of material for her books.

One month later, Acting Major Hiller, thoroughly trained in high-level telepathy by Jeff Croner and his second-in-command, Bill Johns, sets out alone dressed as a Noyan woman to find one of the mysterious Noyan cities. Before long she encounters two Noyans, Ala and Miro, returning to their home city of Muna, and crosses mental swords with them. She quickly realises that they are both mentally and physically stronger than herself, but before she has time to learn any of the secrets of the Noyans' teleportation the three of them are captured by another group of Noyans from the city of Medd.

Medd turns out to be a wonderful city within a cavern, and Janice, Ala and Miro are imprisoned near the Justice Hall to await their trial. While there, Janice, to allay suspicion, hints that she is a member of the ebru, a mysterious religious race living on the planet, and later, in the Judgment Hall when the three of them are subjected to the concentrated mental might of the sixteen judges, she again uses this trick at a crucial moment to save her life, and that of Ala and Miro.

Continuing on their way to Muna, Janice discovers the secret of the Noyans' teleportation, but is forced to mentally fight and kill Ala. Miro then physically attacks her, but before she is beaten and tied up sends a mental message to the Meddos to warn them that Janice is an Earth spy. Using her newly discovered powers of teleportation, Janice wins through the traps of the Meddos and goes to report to Jeff Croner.

Subsequent discussions then open a way for an Earth-Noya collaboration, and Jeff Croner is sent to the planet of Nome for further duties, while Janice continues her interrupted tour of the NO worlds in search of material for her literary work. On Nome Jeff finds that the entire planet is given over to tests of skill from elaborate games which have been evolved over the centuries—the winners sporting long rows of medals signifying the Sports they have mastered, but each Sport is a physical hazard against Death, and Death claims many victims.

Warned to keep away from the Sports grounds by Ofru, a Noman acquaintance, Jeff deliberately attends and is soon coerced into attempting some of the hazards. Upon returning safely to his rooms he finds a strange Noman woman awaiting him, who later turns out to be Janice Hiller in disguise, and together they set about uncovering the mystery underlying the world of Sport—in particular why Jeff is to be killed.

Janice, as herself, meets a former girl friend Lesley Dowling, and the two of them enter a number of the Sports, during which, in the Target, Janice is injured slightly.

XIII

For days nothing happened. Jeff and Janice were not surprised, having done nothing to make anything happen.

Janice stayed away from the Sports for a couple of days, and then went back. She didn't engage in any of the more strenuous Sports with her side bandaged, but there was nothing to prevent her continuing with the Maze. The layout of the Mazes was changed from time to time, but the plan was always the same for the same person, unless he took too long. Janice spent six hours in the Maze one afternoon, five hours the next morning, and then won her medal in the afternoon. It wasn't too spectacular, since she had obviously given herself plenty of time to learn the layout.

So while she still wore bandages she won her wreath.

Not much persuasion was required to keep Lesley away from the Target. Lesley had nerve enough, but the sight of Janice being wounded made her quite ready to believe there were easier Sports than the Target.

Sometimes Jeff accompanied the girls to the Sports ground, not always. Only once did the young Nomans reappear and force him to take part in the Sports. But clearly, as it became obvious that he wasn't lacking in physical courage, as they had probably believed quite honestly at first, they were becoming inclined to leave him alone.

"I think I know the purpose behind it," Jeff told Janice. "The Sports get in your blood. After some experience of them I *want* to go on with them. If I didn't suspect them I would. The people we're fighting must have known that would happen. My guess is that nothing would happen to me for a long time. And then when I had a well-filled wreath and was obviously Sports-mad, something *would* happen to me."

"Sounds reasonable," Janice admitted. "And as for me I think the Sports will never hold any special danger. The idea is probably that I should go away and write a popular novel about Nome and the Sports. That would bring a lot more visitors. The only thing I'm bothered about is Lesley."

Jeff nodded. "What exactly *does* she know about you?" he asked.

"The details don't matter. But if she told anyone exactly what she remembered of me on Mercury, he'd be able to work out, if he were smart enough, that I was a UOF agent and pretty high at that. Funny, we left no tracks on Noya that anyone could pick up, and it was a far bigger affair than Mercury."

"I'm glad to hear it," Jeff murmured. "I was beginning to think the little jobs you do with me were only mild relaxation for you."

Janice looked at him levelly. "Jeff, we're working together and it may not be for the last time. Don't get any wrong ideas about me. If you do, maybe you'll give me something too tough to do some day and we'll both regret it. I may be a little stronger and more intelligent and have a little more nerve than most girls, but there are limits. I've cracked before and I'll probably crack again. I know your record. I don't rate mine as high."

Jeff grunted, unconvinced. But he admitted she had a point.

He went to see Ofru one day while Janice was trying to add the Drop medal to her wreath. Only one positive thing emerged, and there was something negative about that. They talked, they smoked, they drank Noman brandy. Ofru seemed exactly as before, a good friend. But he asked about what had happened at the Sports ground, and said nothing of having seen Jeff there a few days before. Jeff gave him every chance, without admitting he knew he was there, but Ofru pretended not to have seen him since they met. So Ofru, at best, was hiding something.

At first Jeff was unwilling to believe that a man he met by pure chance could be one of the people he was desperately seeking. Jeff didn't believe that much ever happened by pure chance. But then he saw there was probably no chance about the meeting. Ofru had sought him out, and bumped into him. If Jeff hadn't been looking for a fight, Ofru would have pretended to recognise him and given him the warning just the same—a warning designed to send him straight to the Sports ground.

Jeff had one advantage. Ofru had no reason to guess he might be discovered. Ofru knew Jeff hadn't seen him at the ground, and how could he know that Janice, who had, could build up a mental picture that Jeff could identify?

A week after Janice was injured, she took him to one of the open spaces in the Sports ground where they could not possibly be overheard. He thought she was going to tell him something she had discovered, and turned to her eagerly. But she said:

"Jeff, I think it would be as well if we got married, or at least engaged."

He gaped at her. "You know from your espionage experience," she went on coolly, "that you have to forestall suspicions before they arise—the longer the better. Like when I was injured to prove I didn't have extraordinary physical co-ordination. Soon the people we're fighting, who must be watching *you* all the time, will begin to wonder why you spend so much time with me. It will cross their minds that we might be working together, because people—and particularly Nomans—don't believe in platonic friendship. Then they'll watch me, and it will be stalemate."

Jeff fought to consider the move as a stratagem, nothing else. He succeeded. Janice was right.

"Noman marriage isn't legal on Earth," he observed.

"Sure, I know that—think I was proposing? Of course it isn't legal. Earth recognises most forms of marriage, but not one in which neither party promises anything. Let's have this straight. I'm suggesting a Terran engagement or a Noman marriage—each in the line of duty. It will mean nothing, either way, when we leave Nome. Okay?"

Jeff nodded. "Sure."

"The Noman marriage would be best. Then you can move into this hotel. You'll share my room. I can stand that. And that's all. Still okay?"

Jeff shrugged. "I'm a UOF man," he said. "I've done queerer things than this. But is it going to help?"

"No. They'll still watch you. They may even watch me for a while. But we'll be together and ready for anything. And I have an idea something is going to break soon."

"So have I."

They didn't waste any time. They went to a Noman Sportsmaster—an

official title which didn't mean very much—and were married right away according to Noman custom. A wreath was needed, and they had to use Janice's, since Jeff had none. The Sportsmaster warned them that that was supposed to be unlucky.

"We'll take the chance," said Jeff.

It was only afterwards that they remembered they should have asked Lesley to be present.

There was little to do on Nome except the Sports. Janice only had to do the Drop once more to win her Drop medal, and the Walk twice. Neither required any special agility, and her injury had not troubled her.

"But even if we were only acting a marriage," said Jeff wryly, "I refuse to see my bride killed an hour after the ceremony. No Sports to-day."

So they walked in the Sports ground and watched. They saw Lesley doing the Drop. They both frowned, for it was a particularly risky test for her. But she came down neatly enough, and they moved through the crowd to join her. Before they reached her, however, the compressed-air sling hissed again.

"She's up again!" Janice exclaimed. "The little fool . . ."

Somehow they both knew what was going to happen. Telepathy didn't include the gift of prophecy, but sometimes it looked like it. There were times when telepaths knew exactly what was coming, though they could have picked the knowledge from no human mind, even unconsciously.

Janice turned away. Jeff watched, fascinated. Like Janice, he wanted to turn. But he didn't seem to have the strength.

The beam from one of the repulsors was too weak, and the other two slowly turned Lesley in the air. She seemed cool enough, gradually increasing the power of the weak beam. But then it jumped, and she whirled in the air. She only actually fell ten feet. She landed on the back of her neck, and the brittle crack exploded in the sudden silence.

There was nothing anyone could do. Jeff and Janice wandered away, silent.

"If I were really a UOF operative through and through," said Janice bitterly, "I'd be glad about that. We're safe now. No one can find out who I am. But I'd rather Lesley was still alive to represent a danger."

"She was bound to get herself killed," said Jeff. "We knew that. The further she went in the Sports, the more certain it was that she'd keep on until she made a mistake. If it wasn't one thing, it would be another. Nome ought to be closed to Terrans. Let the Nomans kill themselves, but . . ."

"Let's snap out of it," said Janice. "She might have killed herself mountaineering or ski-ing. She didn't have to come to Nome to do it."

They tested their bedroom that night. Jeff was puzzled to find that it couldn't possibly be tapped.

"Sometimes I wonder," he said hopelessly, "if we're not imagining the whole thing. That's what it was on Noya—not ending a danger, but finding there was none. And you had to risk your life to find that out. Could it be happening again?"

"No," said Janice positively. "After all, why should they tap this bedroom? We're nowhere near finding anything out. The only thing we have learned is that Ofru is a lead. And at the moment we don't dare follow it. They can afford to wait till we're getting warm before they start watching

us closely.”

“But what are we going to do?”

“I,” said Janice, “am going to sleep. I must say the people we’re after showed decent feeling not listening in on a newly-wed couple. Saves us a lot of trouble.”

Jeff undressed in the bathroom—not that undressing was a major undertaking. When he returned Janice was in one of the beds, and he could have sworn she was already asleep.

XIV

Inaction ended the next day as Janice was doing the Walk. Jeff didn’t notice anything had happened at first. He saw she stumbled dangerously, but remembering what had happened in the Target he wasn’t perturbed.

But then Janice’s thought tore down to him: “Get clear, Jeff. Mingle with the crowd. I’ll join you if I can.”

Without wasting time in looking about him Jeff did as he was told. There was always a big crowd watching the Flame, and he joined that. He left his mind fractionally open so that Janice would know where he was. She joined him a few seconds later.

“The Sports *are* fixed,” she said quietly. “The wind stopped for a fraction of a second just now. You know what that means. You’re bending into it, so you fall. It comes on again, but not soon enough. The only thing that saved me was that I knew what was going to happen an instant before it did. So it was no accident. Someone was operating it.”

Jeff stared at her, lost for the moment.

“Don’t you see what that means?” she demanded. “Lesley didn’t make a mistake yesterday. She was murdered—after the under-cover Nomans had found out about me from her. They mean to kill me, and if they can’t do it in the Sports they’ll do it some other way.”

“What can we do?”

“There’s only one thing I can do. They know I’m a UOF operative, but they can’t know I can pass as a Noman. I can become Armine.”

“But you can’t go back to the hotel.”

“Of course not. I’ve a cache in the grounds in case I had to stop being Janice Hiller in a hurry. Then, since I have to do something in a hurry, I’m going after Ofru.”

“What do I do?”

“Nothing just now. Go back to the hotel. They won’t kill you, not without due consideration anyway. Earth can make trouble over you. But I’m under cover, and secret agents can always be removed quietly without anyone taking official notice. Bye Jeff. I’ll call you if I need you.”

That was that. A few steps and she was lost in the crowd. Jeff didn’t try to go after her. There was no time for argument.

Janice kept hidden in the crowd as far as possible. Privileged by her injury, she had been wearing Earth clothes, which now made her conspicuous, for even the Terrans about were dressed in Noman style. As she reached the blank wall of a Maze she left the crowds, turned along the wall, and hurried behind the high wall of a Walk. No one was on the Walk, and there was no one in sight. It occurred to her how dangerous it would be to be found there, but she didn’t waste time on fears.

She felt along the wall and grasped a rope of invisible plastic. There

was an instant just before her fingers grasped it when she thought it had been removed, but then her hand closed on it. The wall of the Maze was fifteen feet high, but she was up and over in a few seconds. Inside, she felt safer. The chances of anyone in the Maze wandering along this particular outside alley were small. And she didn't intend to be there long.

She pulled aside the loose soil at the base of the wall some distance from where she had left the rope. She drew out a packet. She wasn't dark enough for a Noman, and her first action was to stain herself golden-brown. The sticking-plaster on her side was a problem. Whether she revealed it or hid it she would be asking for trouble. Her enemies would be looking for a girl with an injured side.

She peeled off the plaster carefully and examined the injury. It was healing well, but if she wore the shorts and halter of Armine it could still be seen too easily. Without long consideration of the problem she could only think of one thing to do, and she wasn't happy about it. She put her arm in a light sling torn from the dress she had been wearing. It hung over the wound, keeping it in shadow, and at the same time making it clear that she wore no bandages. It was the best she could do.

She had weapons in her cache, but she had to leave them. Carrying a gun she would be more conspicuous than she had been in her Terran clothes. She put them back with the bottle of stain, what was left of her dress and the other things she had thought she might be glad to have. Then, as Armine, she climbed out of the Maze. She now wore a wholly spurious Sports wreath, which was dangerous on Nome, but not nearly so dangerous as wearing her own or none at all. The wreath was a sort of identification. Nomans could identify people they didn't know well by their wreaths easier than by their faces.

Jeff had given her Ofru's address. She went there, trying to form a plan and failing. He wouldn't recognise her, but how would that help? She reached the door of Ofru's flat and was still no further forward.

If necessary she would ring the bell and meet the Noman face to face. But first she tried the door. It was not locked. She went inside silently, closed the door, and stood just behind it, listening. She heard heavy, regular breathing. Someone was there, and presumably asleep.

Quietly she went into the bedroom. It was Ofru, sure enough. He wasn't properly in bed, but looked as if he had thrown himself half on it and half off, too tired to take off his clothes.

Janice considered searching the flat, but rejected the idea. There would be nothing to find. It would all be in the mind of the sleeping man.

Well, she had some experience of handling minds. Ofru was a telepath or he was not, and it would only take an instant to find out.

She would have drawn back that questing thought if she could. Instantly, before Ofru opened his eyes, she knew what had happened. He was a telepath all right, and he slept with his mind as an alarm circuit. The first cautious attempt to tap it alerted him and brought him fully awake.

Janice leapt on top of him, trying to get her hands on his throat before he was fully aware of the situation. But the sling that held one arm hampered her, and before she had both arms free Ofru had broken her grasp.

Janice had never fought a strong man before, without weapons. It was

utterly hopeless unless she could find some advantage, and find it at once. Ofru had given Jeff a hard fight, and then he was fighting fair. That didn't apply now, as an attempt to claw her eyes followed by a kick aimed at her stomach proved. She did manage to hit him with all her strength in the solar plexus, but that only showed how hopeless her task was. She hurt her hand and numbed her wrist, but Ofru only grunted.

For long seconds she managed to avoid his heavier blows and prevent him from getting up. She tried a mental attack, and it was brushed off. She stopped trying to hit the Noman and invited him to turn it into a mental battle. But Ofru wasn't caught. It was a temptation to beat this surprisingly competent telepath on her own ground, but there was always the possibility that he would fail. If he kept it a purely physical contest he couldn't fail.

He was gaining, climbing to his feet, and Janice had no means of stopping him. He spread his arms to crush her—and suddenly stared as she moved back ten feet instantaneously and picked up an electric clock as a weapon.

It only worked for a second. Almost at once Ofru knew that Janice had not moved, and that the girl picking up the clock was an illusion. The Noyans who had deceived Jeff and other Earthmen by that trick had had everything in their favour, and everything was against Janice, particularly her own heavy breathing so near to Ofru.

But the trick had given her time enough to get her hands on the Noman's throat, and this time she clung.

Ofru fought as if he had only been playing up to then. He clawed at Janice, he threw himself on the floor, he rolled and wrenched away from her, he jabbed whenever he could reach her. But Janice knew when she had the upper hand. She confused his mind, making him cushion her fall when he thought he was dropping heavily on her, and made him miss with his most savage blows. But above all she hung on, pressing more tightly as he grew weaker, ignoring the pain that he was able to inflict.

Twice he pretended to be dead, and each time she grimly ignored the pretence. The third time it was no act. She would have left him alive if she could, not from squeamishness, but because she might be able to learn more from him alive than dead.

Without taking time to rise or remove her hands from his throat she probed at the dead mind. It was like a chalk drawing being washed away by rain. But that wasn't what disappointed her. It was the fact that Ofru knew next to nothing. He was a member of a body that called itself the Builders, but he had never done anything but swear oaths and take orders. None of his superiors were known to him. He had not lied when he told Jeff he didn't know what was going to happen at the Sports ground. The only thing that might be of use was the knowledge of the job he had been engaged on. It had nothing to do with Janice or Jeff. Ofru's whole energies in the last few days had been aimed at tracking down and liquidating a Noman by the name of Kon.

Ofru had been a telepath. Kon, whoever he was, was also a telepath. There was knowledge of scores of telepaths in Ofru's mind, all telepaths who never used their abilities except on the order of the Builders—which explained the "beautiful silence" Jeff had mentioned when he threw his mind open on Nome—and all Builders themselves. Apparently every Builder was a telepath, and every Noman telepath a Builder. But the talent

was carefully concealed, so carefully that Ofru had not been allowed to use telepathy in his search for Kon.

So Janice's thought was cautious as she sought Jeff and asked him to meet her, and particularly cautious as she told him where. Telepathy wasn't safe on a world containing so many silent telepaths. If they could now identify the Builders, at least when they were close to them, it wasn't impossible that the Builders could identify them whenever they started sending out beams.

Janice rose stiffly. She looked at her hands. They wouldn't win her any good marks in a beauty competition. They were swollen, scratched, red and stiff. The rest of her was hardly as good as new either. Her face and her clothes had escaped damage, but the rest of her was covered with scratches and bruises. She looked as if she had been in a fight, which didn't suit her plans at all. She didn't mind looking as if she had been hurt in the Sports, but she could think of no Sport which might produce her various injuries.

But there was nothing she could do about it. At least the wound in her side hadn't opened. She cleaned the cuts and sealed them with a freeze she found in the bathroom.

Ofru she left where he was. She couldn't be completely certain he had been unable to get a telepathic warning out, but she didn't believe he had.

There were a lot of people about when she came out of the building, and some of them would remember her. She wiped the disguise off her face, not wishing Armine to be connected with Ofru's death.

Now they had to accomplish something in a hurry if they were going to accomplish anything at all. It had been necessary for her to seek out Ofru alone, for Jeff was known and had no convenient disguise as she had. But now that they knew they were up against an organisation, and had no organisation of their own, they could only act quickly and hope for the best.

Jeff was waiting for her at the place she had suggested—a place neither of them had visited, well away from the Sports ground, which was nothing but a rendezvous.

Jeff nodded in reply to her unspoken question. "They were watching me," he said, "but I think I must have dropped them. They may pick me up at any moment again, though. Janice, do you realise the spot we're in?"

"Fully," she said. "So much that we haven't time to talk about it." She told him all she had learned.

"You killed him," said Jeff in wonder. "Just after telling me not to expect too much from you."

"Never mind that. The only thing we can do is get on the tail of this Kon. He's a telepath, so we can pick him up. It'll be dangerous, of course, but so is anything now. We have to do something. I've no idea of what he knows—but he's the only lead."

Jeff waited as she concentrated. It took only an instant. "Alerted him," she said, "but I know where he is."

"If Ofru was after him," said Jeff, "maybe he's on our side."

"Maybe. But we have to find him first. We can't fill the ether with explanations when the Builders are apparently all telepaths."

There was no public transport within Nome City. If you wanted to go anywhere, you walked. Since the city was grouped about the Sports ground, it was seldom necessary for anyone to walk far.



"I wish we were out of this city," said Jeff. "I expect we'd be in danger anywhere in this world, but it must be greatest here."

"You're about to have your wish," Janice told him. "Kon's just entering the tube for the night side."

They hurried to the big transport station. There they separated, knowing

it must be watched. They kept no link with each other, but followed Kon independently. Janice boarded the electric train for the night side quite openly, trusting her disguise, but she knew nothing of Jeff until he rejoined her a hundred miles from Nome City.

"Think I got aboard clear," he said. "I got in the middle of a crowd and pushed. I expect there are quite a few people on the train who had no intention of going to the night side."

The train, inside, was simply a series of tiny compartments containing long seats and nothing else. There was no effort at luxury when the longest journey took only fifteen minutes.

"Kon was two trains ahead," Janice said. "That means he has a start of twenty minutes, making for Spurl."

"Wrong for once," said Jeff, grinning. "He changed his mind once he knew you had got that and decided to go to Garla instead."

"Oh well. I said I wasn't infallible. But that's promising. It looks as if he's just running, with no particular goal. We're bound to track him down."

"Do you think we can risk trying to find out if there are any Builders on this train?"

Janice considered. "I think we have to risk it," she said. "We can only be comparatively safe when we've covered our tracks from Nome City."

They threw out questing beams, Jeff taking the front half of the train and Janice the rear. Jeff found nothing, and Janice was silent. "All right?" he asked.

"No. There's two men looking into all the compartments, and they're not far from here."

"Suppose we jump them and learn all they know?"

"That wouldn't be much. They seem to be on a lower level in the Builders' organisation than Ofru was, or I probably couldn't have touched their minds and got away with it. Besides, if they don't report there will be trouble. They don't know about me. They're looking for you."

Jeff looked about. "Then there's only one thing to do," he said. "I'm going outside."

There was a little over two feet clearance between the side of the train and the wall of the tube. Jeff opened the door and slid out on the running-board. Janice shuddered involuntarily, thinking of the speed of the air whistling past the smooth walls of the train. But she had only time to shut the door and lean back before the two men opened the door, looking inside, and went on.

Before they were more than a yard away, a man and a woman came into the compartment and sat down. Janice cursed under her breath. If Jeff didn't come in pretty soon he wouldn't come in at all. She searched her mind for a way of getting rid of the man and girl quickly, and then noticed their clothes.

She told Jeff what to do, and then suddenly there were five Janices in the compartment. Before the two Nomans could make a sound they had been clubbed behind the ear and had slumped in their seats.

Jeff climbed in, gasping, and looked at them. "Shades of Noya!" he exclaimed. "Shall I give them another knock, before they discover they've been hit by shadows?"

Janice shook her head. "They'll stay out," she said. "They've never encountered anything like that before."

"How does it work when they're non-telepaths?"

"You know that. We worked direct on the perception centres, without touching the brain proper. But it had to be quick, or they'd notice the difference between the shadows and me."

Jeff transferred the Noman's wreath to his shoulders and pulled on the black shorts. There was also a vivid red cape, and if the result wasn't a transformation, at least it would help to make it difficult to identify him.

Janice meanwhile had appropriated the girl's blouse, skirt and wreath. The clothes, faintly brown, were diaphanous. Under the skirt she retained her shorts with her money pouch. It was a typical Noman costume.

"Should have thought of this," she said. "It won't excite comment, and it's just opaque enough to hide the bruises and scratches. Not such a well-filled wreath as mine, but at least it's genuine."

They rolled the Nomans under the seats, dressed in the clothes they had discarded, just as the train slowed.

"Should really kill them," Jeff remarked. "But I'm not callous enough for that."

"It's not necessary," said Janice. "I know the Noman mind, remember. They won't go to the police. They'll look for me to get their own back. They'll consider it a private matter."

XV

They didn't leave the depot. Kon hadn't alighted at Garla, the first stop on the route, but had gone on to Riton in a hopeless effort to cover his tracks. Jeff and Janice just caught the connection for Riton, gaining ten minutes.

The journey to Riton, also on the night side, took only seven minutes. They alighted and left the depot almost at a run.

"He hasn't a chance, poor devil," Jeff remarked. "But at that he didn't show much sense. If he takes the long way round, naturally we'll catch up on him."

"I don't think he knows the tube system very well," said Janice. "However, talking of people who haven't a chance, I think I'd rather be Kon than us."

Riton was a small town, a mere amusement park. There were no Sports on the night side of the planet, and the towns and cities there, cities which never saw day, were purely relaxation centres. Riton offered dancing, theatres, cinemas, cabaret and everything else that night life in any big city on Earth provided. Jeff and Janice hurried through streets that were made to be lit by artificial light, in a town built for pleasure.

But Kon had taken the quickest route out of the town. There was little free space on the light side of Nome, but here on the dark side there was plenty. People in search of diversion crowd together, so there were vast dark undeveloped areas near all the pleasure cities.

No one glanced a second time at Jeff and Janice. In the garish light they looked like any young Noman couple out to enjoy themselves.

Soon they were clear of the town, and almost at once they were in a waste that no one seeing Nome City could guess was to be found on the same

planet. No one ever came here. Couples in search of solitude might come a little way out of Riton, but Kon was five miles from the city now and his pursuers only a mile behind him.

"He's opening something," Janice exclaimed suddenly. "I can't get a clear picture. He's letting himself do it by habit, so that he doesn't have to think of what he's doing. Is he going to get away?"

They ran most of the last mile and slowed down, puzzled, knowing Kon was only a few yards away but seeing no hiding-place. Nome had no moon, but the atmosphere, though thick, was so clear and invariable that the stars gave a dim light on the dark side.

"Well, he's under the ground somewhere," said Jeff. "But I can't see anything but that black night moss, can you?"

They searched the ground, feeling the dank moss with their hands, but they could find no sign of a break. In turn they probed at Kon's mind, confirming that he was somewhere beneath their feet, but failing to learn how he had got there. He knew he was safe if he could only keep the secret of his hiding-place.

"That vault, whatever it is," murmured Jeff, "must be some sort of headquarters or store of the Builders. Kon probably doesn't matter now, if only we could get inside. It may tell us exactly what we want to know."

"We'll get inside," said Janice grimly.

"How—the Noyan teleportation?"

"Wouldn't work. Kon has kept all knowledge of the inside of the vault from us. If I tried to make him think I was standing beside him I couldn't deceive him for a moment. No, we have to work on him from here."

Jeff said: "You're the master telepath. It's up to you. Anything I can do?"

"Yes, hold me so that I don't fall. I have to be relaxed."

"Hadn't you better lie down?"

"The feel of that slimy moss would ruin my concentration, even through your cloak."

"Then I'll lift you, and you can forget everything but getting to Kon."

He picked her up and held her steady as she became a dead weight. Her mouth fell open loosely and even her breathing almost stopped.

Jeff kept out of it, but he knew what was going on. Janice caught Kon's mind and held it, and gradually built up power like a sheath forming about it. Jeff had the inevitable feeling of someone watching another person do something he could do himself, that he could do it much better. But that subsided as with a patience he knew he didn't possess Janice built up her power over Kon's mind.

At last Kon tried to appeal to the Builders, who were trying to kill him, rather than submit to these two beings of whom he knew nothing. But he had left it too late. Janice let nothing past. If another telepath anywhere on Nome tried to contact Kon now, he could only reach the conclusion that Kon was dead.

Frontal attack had failed, but Janice's policy was encirclement. First she imprisoned Kon's mind, and then she began to eat into it. She learned things that were useless to her, but everything she took from Kon meant less he had with which to resist her.

There was a noble courage about the way he kept what she wanted till

last, so that long after she knew he was only a tiny cog in a machine whose purpose was unknown to him he still kept the secret of the vault. The Builders, apparently, were trying to kill him for no other reason than that he knew a little more than they thought safe. They had renounced him, but he wouldn't renounce them. The one thing he learned from Janice was that she was working against the Builders, and that was enough to invalidate any attempt at explanation on Janice's part.

Then Jeff became aware that a new element had entered into the struggle. Janice was trying to make Kon open the vault, and Kon was fighting to do something else. Janice was handicapped by ignorance of Kon's purpose. When she knew that Kon was trying to alert the Builders by radio, since he couldn't use telepathy, it was too late. He got out only a fragment of a message, but that would be enough.

It was the last resistance he could make, however. Jeff was even more careful not to intervene in any way as he saw that Kon was being forced to open the vault himself. Janice would have been content with the secret, but now she had built up such force around Kon that he was merely an automaton, obeying her commands.

A section of the earth rose silently and they saw light within. But they also saw Kon fall, strained to the limit and past it by the power exerted on him. He broke like a lever used to move an impossibly heavy weight. When they reached him he was dead.

Janice had the secret of the vault now. They closed it and looked about them. Jeff whistled involuntarily. Hidden under the earth was a vast library. On the shelves, however, were not books but files. He pulled one out, then paused.

"Janice," he said. He had lowered her to the ground as the battle with Kon ended and she could return to full awareness of what was going on about her. She was a little pale, that was all, the pallor showing up grotesquely the stain on her face. She looked up inquiringly.

"Get out of here, Janice," said Jeff. "If we're caught it won't do Earth or UOF any good. Someone has to get clear with anything there is to be learned here."

"Yes, but why does it have to be me?"

"Because you have the better chance of getting clear. Besides, if I'm caught the Builders will still have to think twice about killing me. They could rub you out without a moment's hesitation. You know that."

Janice nodded. "It goes against the grain. But you're right. I take it you mean to stay here and send what you learn to me, as long as you can?"

"Just that. Don't waste any time. Don't tell me where you're going, and try not to let me know where you are when we're in contact. Okay?"

They didn't even shake hands. Janice opened the vault again, climbed out, and in a few seconds was lost in the darkness.

Jeff opened the first file and examined it. He frowned as he saw it contained records of individuals. Five hundred in the file. Over a hundred files on that shelf. Ten shelves from floor to ceiling. Hundreds of similar sections stretching away in the vault.

He had hoped, not being fond of danger when he could avoid it, that he would be able to find out what he wanted in a few minutes and leave the vault long before anything could be done about Kon's warning. But so far he had only seen what appeared to be a complete record of every Noman

there ever was, and it would take him a long time to find any purpose behind the records.

He sighed and settled down to the job. It didn't look as if he was going to find this easy.

In the clear atmosphere of Nome the lights of Riton were visible for miles. It was deceptive, walking towards the lights through the gloom. Often Janice thought she was nearly there, only to find that there was a long way yet.

She had to go to Riton, though there might be trouble waiting for her. The next nearest city was twenty-five miles from the vault, and by the time she reached it the Builders would have had a chance to organise a wide cordon. Her only hope was to make for Riton, and reach it before the Builders were organised.

She would do it, too. She knew where the Builders were. They were easy to identify, once she knew the secret. When she and Jeff had failed to find telepaths on the planet, it had been partly because they had really been looking for telepathic activity, not telepaths, and there was none; and partly because they had missed them like tall men looking over the heads of pygmies, or mistaking giants for trees. For anyone who had the right level, the Builders were surprisingly easy to pick out.

They were converging on the vault, hundreds of them, if not thousands, but Janice reached the streets of Riton just as the first of them arrived in the town. She forced herself to stroll casually towards the depot. She found a gambling-saloon fronted by mirrors and looked at herself closely. The first impression, she knew, was everything. She was satisfied with what she saw. She was more like the Nomans than the Nomans themselves. Carefully she removed all traces of the black moor moss from her sandals and legs. She slapped her cheeks to force colour back in them and disordered her hair slightly. Then she went on.

No one at the depot cast a second glance at her. As Armine she was only passably pretty, and the disguise extended even to the way she held her body—with less than her natural grace. There was already a close check on travellers, but the watchers were looking for Jeff Croner and Janice Hiller, not the soft-spoken Noman girl who boarded the train for Exron.

As the train moved silently she got the first message from Jeff: "Still all clear," he said. She could hear his voice sounding in her brain as if he were beside her. He was using the perception centres because he didn't want to touch her mind direct. That would have told him where she was—and it might be necessary for him not to know. She took the hint and closed everything but the part of her mind which handled auditory stimuli.

"I'm beginning to get the hang of this," he went on. "It's a plan, all right, and a pretty far-reaching one. These records cover not only every Noman living now, but every Noman there has been in the last five hundred years. The more recent records are complete, the earlier ones summarised. And of one thing there is no doubt. The Sports are used to kill individuals, groups and masses as the plan dictates.

"Another thing I've found is that we're by no means the first to investigate the Noman Sports. Most of those who tried it before us were Nomans, but there have been others of many races. The records show that the Builders are absolutely ruthless in keeping their plan secret. Once they destroyed a



whole race from a nearby system who were showing too much interest in Nome and its Sports.

"This is a warning, Janice. Knowing you're dangerous they'll make every effort to see you don't get off the planet alive. They must already have killed scores of girls who might have been you, hoping to catch you among them. These records show their methods. If someone shoots you

in the back, it won't necessarily mean you've been identified. It will only mean you're sufficiently like Janice Hiller to be worth killing on chance. Got that? Take care. If there's a quick way and a safe way, take the safe way every time."

The voice stopped, and Janice knew it wouldn't come again until Jeff had discovered something fresh.

On some worlds disguise would have been easy. But on Nome what could she do? Whatever she did she would be five foot eight, 37, 24, 38, blue-eyed, a telepath, with a half-healed wound in her side and sundry other injuries. She was twenty-eight and couldn't make herself a day younger or older. If she dyed her hair some other colour she couldn't stop it growing up blonde at the roots. In altering her features without artificial aid she had done all she could in the way of undetectable disguise.

XVI

She reached Exron, and even there there was a check. Exron was a small town in the twilight zone, frequented chiefly by artists of many worlds who tried to capture the fantastic beauty of the meeting of night and day. She didn't see the town, for she changed to a train for Nome City without leaving the depot.

She would have stayed clear of Nome City if it had been possible, but it wasn't. The capital city had the only spaceport on the planet. Only one was needed since Nome had little trade. People came and went in their millions, but only a thin trickle of goods entered or left the planet.

At Nome City she had her closest call. She saw a man watching her, and knew, without need of a thought beam, that he was a Builder and that he had noticed her general resemblance to the woman he was watching for. She walked up to him.

"Excuse me," she said, "can you direct me to the nearest Sportsmaster?"

Her liquid Noman tones did it. The man might have his orders to shoot anyone who might possibly be Janice Hiller. But apart from the fact that he must have seen a picture of the Earthwoman, and knew this girl was not her, no Terran could talk as she did. She saw his suspicions dissolve, and he told her politely where she could find a Sportsmaster—the same one, Janice noted, who had married her and Jeff centuries ago . . . or could it really be two days?

It was early morning now. When she was last in Nome City it had been late afternoon. What had happened to all that time Janice could hardly work out. All her journeys by train had only taken an hour or two. But she had walked ten miles and had a long mental battle which she now realised must have gone on far longer than she or Jeff knew. But Kon must have known how long it was . . .

Nome City wasn't awake yet. It was as warm and bright as ever, but the streets were deserted. Knowing she would be much safer in a crowd, Janice went into a gymnasium near the depot, had a hot bath, slept in a private room for a couple of hours, had a workout and finished off with a cold shower. At that time of the morning there was no danger of meeting anyone else. There would be others about, certainly, but not enough to strain the resources of the gymnasium. When she came out into the street again it was quite busy, and she felt as good as new.

There was still no word from Jeff. She was puzzled. The Builders had had plenty of time to get to the vault. But just as she was beginning to become anxious, the voice sounded in her ear again.

"This place is quite a stronghold," Jeff said cheerfully. "I bet the Builders never thought anyone would ever be inside it, using their own defences to keep them out. They've been squatting outside for hours now, waiting for something to happen. But they must know by now that I know they're there.

"Janice, I've cracked it from these records, and believe me it's at once the most hellish and most beautiful plan of conquest I ever came across! Yes, it's conquest. Eventually. It was started five hundred years ago. The Nomans had had the Sports for a long time then. They had no space travel at that time, and they needed war or the Sports, one or the other. But then the Builders came along and took over the Sports quietly—so quietly that there was never any record of it in Noman history. The plan was complete then, from the start. Briefly, they set out to build up a race which would conquer the galaxy. Sounds a fairly common screwball idea, but where the Builders were different was that they went about it scientifically and very, very patiently. They knew it would take hundreds of years, perhaps thousands.

"Whether Darwin's theories of evolution are sound or not, they could certainly be made to work, and that's exactly what the Builders have been doing. The Sports are a means of ensuring the survival of the fittest—but not the natural fittest, the fittest in the Builders' scheme of things. They set out to build a race which, individually and collectively, would be hard,



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ruthless, infallible, and born and bred in danger. You know how far they've gone in that respect. But they've a long way still to go, and the devil of it is, I can't see any way to stop them!

"I told you the Builders fix the Sports so that anyone they want killed dies. We always guessed that. But what we didn't guess was that everyone who didn't fit into the Builders' conception of the master-race was first on the list. It isn't five million who die every month—it's more like forty million. With no access to the official records, how could anyone know how fast the Nomans breed? That's it, then—forty million births a month. Forty million the Builders can afford to remove. And every generation they get nearer to the perfect race—in their lights.

"Don't make any mistake about it, Janice, it works. The records show how the race is gradually changing. The Nomans five hundred years ago rated pretty low in warlike qualities, and the talents that go with them. But now they're 'way above us, and I think we'd find that in a war with Nome their personal qualities, coupled with the fact that they could afford to lose forty million men and women a month, would tip the scales in their favour. And remember, they've hardly started yet!"

There was a pause, then Jeff finished: "Signing off now. Get what I've told you to UOF somehow, and leave it to them. What they can do about it isn't my problem. I won't be there. If I can get any more I'll come on again. I wish I could have told you some way to fight this, but I don't see one. 'Bye, Janice. Oh, just one more thing. I wouldn't advise UOF to use what I fear is going to happen to me as an excuse to start a fight. I think Earth would find Nome is too big for her already."

The voice stopped, and Janice had to make a savage effort before she could control her tear ducts. It wasn't that there had ever been any feeling between her and Jeff. It was the hopelessness of Jeff's struggle from the start. They had been two against a world. She might escape and she might not. But someone had had to stay in the vault and try to learn something and whoever stayed was finished from the time the other left. She had known that at the time.

She forced herself to be cold, knowing that scientific thought could often see a loophole where impulsiveness would be useless. She saw no way of breaking up the Builders' plan. But she did see something that Jeff appeared to have missed—that there must be one.

She wished desperately that she could send a thought to direct Jeff in a further search. But it was too dangerous—yet. She could only hope that he would go on looking, and that the Builders would let him.

She watched the spaceship come down. There were three every day, bringing thousands of pleasure-seekers from a dozen systems. This ship was the *Philippa*, she saw; it couldn't be better from her point of view.

She could see no way of getting on board other than by using the faculty which had enabled her to dispose of Ofru. If everyone round the *Philippa* could be made to see her running for the ship, or anywhere else on the ground, as Janice Hiller, the attention of every Builder anywhere near would be so taken up that Armine would have a good chance of slipping on board.

It was a good idea, and it would almost certainly work. The only drawback Janice could see was that it was impossible.

She could make perhaps three people see her alter ego—four or five for

a short time. And that wasn't nearly enough. She could see at least a dozen people who were closely scrutinising anyone who made any attempt to go near the vessel—from Nome City. The passengers coming off were spared hardly a glance. It was no use occupying the attention of four Builders if there were eight more who would shoot any girl of her height who went near the ship.

Suddenly she saw the way. She gauged the distances carefully and realised with cold regret that several innocent people were going to die to enable her to reach the spaceship. By a conscious effort she excluded the thought. The UOF code was the greatest good for the greatest number, and this was no time for a reassessment of ethical values. A few would die now, or countless billions soon.

She picked out the Builders in the vicinity, carefully and painstakingly, fully aware that if she missed one she was in her last few seconds of life, and those who died would die for nothing.

With Jeff's help she could cover the dozen. He was far away, in a danger as great as hers, but she didn't hesitate to send her demand for assistance.

"Jeff! Yes, I know this is dangerous. But it's too late to matter now. I need your help." She showed him the scene in full detail, for he had to know it as well as she did, pinpointed the Builders, and in one flash told him what to do. Then she said "Now!"

Janice, a striking figure in the vivid scarlet dress she had been wearing before she disappeared from the ken of the Builders, burst into the open, running from the Spaceport Hotel to the ship. A dozen guns came up, beams flashing from them. The passengers disembarking were mown down. There were screams of terror and pain, suddenly cut off as other beams finished the job of destruction and murder. It looked like purposeless massacre, for no one saw the running figure but the Builders. It was all Jeff and Janice could do to deceive twelve, without adding to the task.

The figure in the red dress ran on unharmed. The beams passed through it without searing her dress. As she reached the ship and darted inside, the Builders, stunned, stopped firing—then raised their blasters as they saw another figure, in pellucid brown this time but otherwise the same, just reaching the ship. They were far too late. A few more passengers went down, charred to ashes, but the hull of the *Philippa* took the rest of the beams.

Janice ran straight to the control room, knowing the captain would be there. His grey face showed he had seen the massacre.

"That'll show you this is serious." Janice gasped. "Now let's get off the ground—fast!"

The captain and the other officers about seemed incapable of movement, frozen by what they had just seen. Janice jumped to the controls herself. She knew nothing of spaceship operation, but she was prepared to take what she wanted from the captain's mind. Her movement brought him alert again.

"UOF?" he asked briefly.

"Yes. Codeword for the month is Jezebel. Now do we go up?"

"But the passengers . . . The people outside—"

"If we stay, we die too. They're not after the passengers. They're after me. Don't waste time, man—argue when we're clear if you must."

XVII

The captain of any spaceship had to be able to make up his mind in a hurry. This one apparently saw one thing clearly. If he didn't take his ship up and well clear of the field immediately, he might never have the chance to take it up at all. He gave rapid orders. That his decision was right was proved when a heavy beam from the field below caught the ship for one terrifying instant before the *Philippa* shot out of range.

"What is it—revolt?" he demanded.

"I wish it were. Revolt would solve a big problem for Earth. But wait. I have something to do."

She made contact with Jeff again. "Well, I'm clear," she said. "The Nomans have no ships—none that need worry this one anyway. Are you still all right?"

"There seems to be a young army outside. I expect, rather than destroy their records, they mean to starve me out."

"Fine! Look, Jeff, there's one thing you must have missed. The Nomans are non-telepaths, and the Builders are all telepaths. That must have been intended. It must be part of their plan. They could have bred telepathy in or out as they bred everything else. There must be some purpose—can you find anything in the vault about it? It seems to me that the Builders must be the leaders, carefully bred to give commands, and as they're telepaths it looks as if they're meant to give telepathic commands. I—"

"I get it," Jeff exclaimed. "You mean there's a keyword that the Builders can use as a command. Or some method—after all, we've just begun to scratch on the walls of telepathy—whereby they can control the mass of the people. You're probably right. But there's nothing about it here."

Janice turned to the captain again. "If you look in your safe," she said, "you'll find the UOF book requiring you to give all co-operation to operatives."

"I know," said the captain impatiently. He was surrounded by most of his officers by now, some of them grey at what they had just seen. Others, Janice saw with some surprise, were able even in those circumstances to look at her with mildly lascivious eyes. She had wiped off the Armine disguise because the need for it had gone.

"It will also tell you," Janice went on, "the degree of authority which various operatives can exercise over you in an emergency—which you see this is."

"Yes," said the captain, still impatient. "What's the number—your personal code?"

Janice gave it. They all waited as he went to his room and returned. When he came back he looked stunned.

"Total command," he murmured. "You are to be placed in full charge of the ship."

"Right. I wanted that clearly understood. Now drop over the dark side of Nome. Any of you who know the planet—I want to land five miles south-west of the town of Riton."

"You left your mind open," came Jeff's thought. "I heard that. You're crazy."

"I meant to leave it open," Janice retorted. "And I've never been less crazy. If you think we're coming merely to dig you out of a hole, you're mistaken."

"Oh. Then what . . . ?"

"We need that keyword. Or whatever it is. And there are Builders all round you. Let's get to work. We don't have to be there to do this."

She looked round the officers in the control-room of the spaceship. "Which of you are telepaths?" she asked.

Four men stepped forward.

"Any more among the rest of the crew? Get them here. Whoever they are, so long as they're telepaths."

In three minutes, as the *Philippa* dropped into the shadow of Nome, Janice had seven men and three women facing her, all claiming to be telepaths.

"Now you may think you know quite a bit about telepathy," she told them grimly, "but believe me, you're going to learn something now. There's no science of telepathy yet—just a few individuals learning all they can. There's twelve of us—"

"Eleven," someone remarked.

"Eleven here and one in a vault near Riton. Some of you may know him, Jeff Croner."

"Jeff!" a lieutenant exclaimed. "Is he in this?"

"Yes, and likely to stay in it for ever if this doesn't work. But the purpose of this isn't to save one man. I'd tell you it was to save Earth if you hadn't read too many space-thrillers and didn't think that was some writers' dream.

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THE ESP WORLDS

But remember this, it's pretty important. I won't explain what we're going to do, because it will be far quicker just to do it."

She stabbed down at the Builders round the vault with her mind. The time for concealment and caution was over. If the Builders were better telepaths than her own group it would be too bad for Earth. But Janice reckoned that while they were probably better than the ten auxiliaries, she and Jeff would have too much voltage for them.

She found the leader without alerting him, and flashing back, turned to her force. "Let me into your minds," she said, "and whatever I try to do, you help. That's all I ask. I'd sit down if I were you. This is going to take a lot of concentration."

She dropped in a vacant control seat and relaxed completely. A word to Jeff, and she built up a force. Jeff, still hundreds of miles away, formed the base. Janice grinned as the crew of the ship, some of whom thought themselves no small beer as telepaths, froze in shock at the power and control of Jeff's mind. She didn't bother examining their reaction as she joined the group.

She and Jeff agreed instantly about their functions. Jeff would hold the group together and link it with Janice. She would direct it. And it was all designed to break one mind.

It would have been sporting to give warning, but Janice, on duty, was rarely sporting. She stabbed at the Builders' leader, and by the time the other Builders knew what was going on and tried to assist their leader, they were gently but firmly held off.

There would never be a perfect telepathic unit. There was tremendous wastage whenever two minds got together, and two minds united were never as strong as two minds working separately. Unity is Strength broke down as a maxim when applied to palpable thought.

But with all the failings of the group Janice had formed, it was too good for one Noman. It was far more vital than the struggle she had had a few hours before with Kon—and it was ten times easier.

Anti-climax, she thought. These big things are often anti-climax. Mere seconds after contact was made, she had the last secret of the Builders.

The Nomans were evolved to respond to command, telepathic command, and never to be able to use telepathy themselves. What Janice had not known, and could never have guessed, was that as she had entered the mind of one Noman woman to steal her knowledge of Nome, she could enter the mind of any Noman, any group of Nomans, or all Nomans, if she knew how. There was a system of grouping whereby exactly the same mental impulses could be shared among any number of Nomans, so-called non-telepaths.

Without the key, those minds were locked—but now Janice had the key.

She didn't bother breaking the group. She turned it aside from the Builders' leader—and turned it on a world.

She didn't use words. But if there had been words they would have been something like this:

"People of Nome! For centuries you have been tricked. You have risked your lives in the Sports, thinking them dangerous, but fair. They were not fair. They were a means of executing those the Builders wished to execute. You have never heard of the Builders? They are the telepaths

among you, and I will tell you how to recognise a telepath.

"When your brother, your daughter, your husband died in the Sports, it may have been through a mistake. But more likely he or she was executed for failing to be what the Builders wanted. When you die—for you will die too, unless you act—it will not be because you have miscalculated the Drop or the Target or the Point or the Walk or the Drive. It will be because you are not what the Builders want for their plan of conquest. Imagine it! You start on the Point as usual. But though you will not know it, and those watching will not know it, the knife will stab your belly whatever you do, and you will die. You begin the Drop. One of your repulsors will fire too strongly or not strongly enough, and you will spin and break your neck. On the Walk the winds will falter and you will fall to the ground. In the Maze which you think you know, there will be no way out.

"Do you understand, people of Nome? You thought five million died a month. You knew your planet supported hundreds of people per square mile, you knew there were millions of Sports grounds. You thought it was reasonable that five million, among so many billion people, might be careless every month.

"But the figure was wrong. Forty million died. Forty million. How long before you are one of them—not by your own fault, but to satisfy the Builders?"

"The name is wrong, Nomans. They are not Sports. They are Murder!"

It was a speech of passion, and it wore Janice out. Inevitably she received a backlash of the anger her message aroused. She was unable to carry out her promise to show the Nomans how to identify telepaths. Jeff had to do that. He showed a whole world of people who had always believed that they had no telepathic ability how to think outwards, to know that a man's mind was not imprisoned by his skull. Telepathic ability could be hidden, of course, and Jeff and Janice would be perfectly safe on Nome. But Ofru and Kon and the Builders' leader himself had not known how to deny telepathic ability to a questing thought. It was a safe bet that none of the other Builders could. And they would have no time to learn.

The *Philippa* dropped on empty plain. The only thing her searchlights could show was the body of the Builders' leader, left where he fell. The group hadn't killed him. It hadn't worked on him long enough for that. He had been killed by his own men once they knew what had happened. Of the rest of the Builders there was no sign. They had sought cover—but would there be cover enough for them anywhere on Nome?

Riton was a small town, and the ship landed five miles from it. But the shouts could be heard plainly from it. Janice shuddered as she stepped to the ground. She couldn't help getting flashes of what was going on all over Nome. You couldn't fool all the people all the time. And when they suddenly discovered that they had been fooled for centuries over their very lives, they went wild. Reaction, with human beings, is always rapid. A few hours earlier, anyone who said anything against the Sports was asking for trouble. Now anyone who tried to stop the mob tearing the various Sports to the ground was a Builder and fit only to die.

The mob would take a terrible toll that day. Before evening, millions would have died. Not all of them would be Builders. But most of the Builders would be among them. The Nomans had picked up with uncanny

aptitude Jeff's brief demonstration on identifying telepaths.

Jeff was taken on board, together with all the files in the vault as evidence. Janice and Jeff would need it to explain what they had done. They looked at each other soberly in the lounge of the *Philippa*, aware that they were responsible for the biggest purge in history. It had taken five hundred years to reach the point the Builders had reached; and only a few hours to tear it all down.

"A few years later it might have been impossible," said Jeff. "The Builders would have learned to conceal themselves, so that no mob could identify them. Or eventually they would have reached their master-race, and then when you told them what had been happening they would have said it was necessary and backed the Builders instead of destroying them. That was a very astute appeal, Janice. You never gave the Nomans a chance to see that the Builders, in their own way, were working for Nome."

Janice shrugged her shoulders tiredly. "Nome will have to start all over again," she said. "Once the purge is over they'll find themselves with a forty-million population surplus every month. But now the UOF can step in, and Nome will become a UOF planet. Maybe they'll start the Sports again, once there is a reaction to the reaction. Honest Sports this time. That's probably the best solution. As far as I'm concerned the Nomans can go on killing themselves from now till Kingdom Come. I've had enough of Nome."

"Me too," agreed Jeff. "Only the difference is that while you can stay away and never come back, I'll probably have to help clean up. That's the disadvantage of being a rank-and-file UOF man instead of a special operative."

Janice managed a smile. "But then you'll be off again, on some other world, with some other problem," she said. "Next time you get in a spot—keep me out of it, will you? I've only got one life, and every time you drag me into something I very nearly lose it."

"I promise."

"Uh-huh," said Janice sceptically. "Now I'm going to go and get into some civilised clothes."

"Oh, that's too bad. Just when the job's over and I have some attention free to . . ." He forgot what he was saying at a sudden thought. "Say, you're not going to write a novel about this, are you?"

"I have to. My public will expect it."

"Have you forgotten that as your husband I can forbid it?"

Her eyes widened. "I had forgotten that, as a matter of fact. Thank goodness it isn't legal."

Jeff looked at her for a long moment. He gave her a hundred per cent for the way she looked in her subtly indecent Noman outfit, ninety per cent for the way she had handled things on Nome, and a hundred per cent for the coolness that had never cracked—two hundred and ninety per cent in all. It was too much for one girl.

"Thank goodness," he said without conviction.

THE END



BOOK REVIEWS

No Place Like Earth. Edited by John Carnell. T. V. Boardman & Co. 10/6.

New Tales of Space and Time. Edited by Raymond J. Healy. Weidenfeld & Nicholson. 10/6.

Weapon Shops of Isher. By A. E. van Vogt. Weidenfeld & Nicholson. 9/6.

City at World's End. By Edmond Hamilton. Museum Press. 9/6.

Islands in the Sky. By Arthur C. Clarke. Sidgwick & Jackson. 8/6.

The reason for this issue's 'guest' reviews is readily apparent, for the very first all-British science fiction anthology has been produced by *New World's* Editor, John Carnell, and he is saved the embarrassment of truthfully saying that *No Place Like Earth* is a very fine anthology indeed. Here is no 'theme' collection, but a straightforward presentation (in handsome book form) of good-quality stories by top British authors.

Arthur C. Clarke, Chairman of the British Interplanetary Society is there with both a lively Introduction, and "Breaking Strain," one of his better, fiction-wrapped, chapters from a spaceman's manual. Journalist Peter Phillips contributes a brilliant robot piece called "Unknown Quantity," and, of course, the title story, lengthened by its sequel "Time to Rest," brings a sweet breath of fresh (Martian) air with the serenity of John Beynon's prose pictures, which proved so popular with *New Worlds'* readers. I was disappointed with the selection of William Temple's "The Two Shadows" which is not a good example of this writer's work, but my own favourite in this book—John Wyndham's "Survival," with its gruesome punch-line ending—more than makes up for any other shortcomings. Tried successes from the pages of *New Worlds* round off the anthology, including stories by John Christopher (a "Max Larkin" adventure), Ian Williamson, George Whitley (A. B. Chandler's alter ego), J. W. Groves and J. T. M'Intosh, which can hold its own with most of the American anthologies of this type, and will aid considerably the prestige and popularity of British science-fiction.

Another anthology is the first of a new series—"Science Fiction Shelf" launched by Weidenfeld & Nicolson—and *New Tales of Space and Time*, edited by Raymond J. Healy, and with an introduction by Gerald Heard, is an excellent choice. This originated in America and is a collection extraordinary in that each story was written especially for it by top-flight authors. All of the contents are superlative, and a mere word or two on each would fail to do justice. Among the ten contributions are gems from such talented craftsmen as Ray Bradbury, Isaac Asimov, Anthony Boucher and A. E. van Vogt, practically guaranteeing success; add to these equally scintillating stories from Kris Neville ("Bettyann" alone is worth the price of the book), Cleve Cartmill, Gerald Heard, and others, and all the publisher has to do is sit back and wait for the sell-out.

The companion volume on the "Shelf"—*Weapon Shops of Isher*—will be acclaimed by those who revel in fast-moving, if somewhat complicated, science-fiction plots. Here is a typical van Vogtian concept involving the universe of the year 4784, ruled by the hedonistic Empress Innelda whose power is opposed by the Weapon Shops, an organisation of scientists with impregnable defense weapons. A hero, Gayle Clark, emerges, and his gifts threaten the whole balance of power. From here on, events happen with bewildering speed, blending skilfully with the secondary theme of the fate of a 20th century reporter who finds himself sucked into this future whirlpool, and whose destiny lies at the wrong end of a cosmic see-saw.

The fourth book on this month's list is the second Edmond Hamilton novel to be reprinted here by the Museum Press. But *City At World's End* is a more mature story than his earlier *Star Kings*. Mr. Hamilton, though, does not pretend that this is anything more than exciting science-fiction, and along these lines he succeeds admirably. The modus operandi is simple—Middletown, a small self-contained American town is target of a super-atomic bomb which detonates above it. But, stranger forces are at play, and a freak effect has transported Middletown and all its scared inhabitants forward in time to a far distant future when the earth is inconceivably old and dying. The human problems are tackled realistically, and a New Middletown is being built. There is no other life, but evidence of past habitation is found, particularly what appears to be a radio-station. An S.O.S. is broadcast—and help comes . . . from across interstellar space, an advance party representing the Federation of Stars, the destiny of mankind. No counterplot is allowed to impede the pace of the story, nor subtlety of style for meditation. But even to the inevitable satisfactory climax, on the grand Hamilton scale, with the rekindling of Earth's inner fires by atomic energy in order to save Middletown's billion-year's old survivors being sent across the galaxy, the reader will be enthralled with what may be termed perfect escapist reading.

The ubiquitous Mr. Clarke has for his hero in *Islands in the Sky* a space-mad youngster who wins as first prize in an American T.V. aviation quiz a trip to Inner Station, an artificial satellite encircling the Earth. It is the 21st Century and Roy Malcolm is a member of the Junior Rocket Club; his ambition is to get out into space, like his Uncle Jim who has already been to the Moon, Mars and Venus. As in his earlier *Sands Of Mars*, wherein the author hero, Martin Gibson, was a projection of Mr. Clarke himself, so in this new novel, I have the feeling that here is Arthur again, in a day-dream of his own youth, filled with enthusiasm for interplanetary travel (he is still), and to one who knows him, this makes the book all the more fascinating.

Roy's trip to Inner Station and his adventures there make pleasant, easy reading, and is materially a sugar-coating for an authoritative prognostication of technical problems and their solutions involving the construction, maintenance and everyday duties of these future satellites, which are no longer so fantastic but in view of recent space-travel research and forecasts by prominent experts, are the logical stepping-stones—in the not too-distant future—to interplanetary exploration. The book is well illustrated by *New Worlds'* artist, Quinn, and has an excellent dust wrapper by R. A. Smith. Recommended for the younger reader.

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